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LOVE OR LUCRE



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A Novel

BY

ROBERT BLACK

LONDON

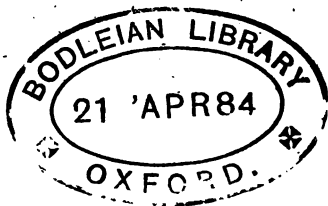
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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. TRUSTY THOMAS AND ONE-EYED GRIM	7
II. SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE	16
III. A HAPPY DAY	24
IV. A LOCK-OUT	35
V. A MAD DOG	41
VI. THE SISTERS , ...	45
VII. TWO PARTNERSHIPS DISSOLVED , ...	56
VIII. PERKINS SEES A GHOST	63
IX. MR. TRIGGS CHANGES HIS ABODE	66
X. TRIGGS HAS TO RENDER AN ACCOUNT	74
XI. AFTERWARD HE REPENTED AND WENT	78
XII. A NEW WAY TO PAY OLD DEBTS	88
XIII. DAN TRIBE'S DILEMMA	94
XIV. LELIA	101
XV. MR. PRITT'S GRAND SPREAD	114
XVI. AFTER THE SPREAD	127
XVII. THE CAPTAIN'S QUANDARY	134
XVIII. COALS OF FIRE	142
XIX. A MORNING CALL	148

CHAPTER	PAGE
XX. A SICK VISIT.	154
XXI. RESOLVED AND CARRIED	159
XXII. A WEDDING	167
XXIII. CONVALESCENCE	174
XXIV. MR. PRITT EXPLAINS	187
XXV. SOMETHING IN THE WIND	192
XXVI. SOMETHING MAY HAPPEN IN SIX MONTHS	197
XXVII. DIVIDING THE SPOIL	205
XXVIII. AN ATTORNEY AMONG THE CLASSICS	215
XXIX. MR. TRIGGS GOES TO ASCOT	226
XXX. THE RACE FOR THE CUP	235
XXXI. A CASUAL OBSERVATION	247
XXXII. A VISITOR AT ROSEBANK	252
XXXIII. CAPTAIN DAVIES REQUIRES AN EXPLANATION	259
XXXIV. THE KNIGHT AND THE LADY; BROTHER AND SISTER	265
XXXV. HUSBAND AND WIFE, AND A SCRAP OF PAPER	280
XXXVI. MR. AND MRS. TRIGGS AT HOME	297
XXXVII. A SISTERLY INTERVIEW	310
XXXVIII. PANDORA	322
XXXIX. TOO LATE	340
XL. DOWN STAIRS AND UP	354
XLI. A HOUSE-WARMING	369
XLII. YOUNG PERKINS HAS HIS INTERVIEW WITH MR. TRIGGS	382

LOVE OR LUCRE.

CHAPTER I.

TRUSTY THOMAS AND ONE-EYED GRIM.

A SUNDAY morning in leafy June, with the scent of roses in the air, when all is still save the cawing of the early rook, and the sky is bright, and calm, and clear, is a heavenly time for country folks. But we are in the neighbourhood of Thames Street, London, where rooks, and trees, and leaves, though the month is leafy June, and though the time is a Sunday morning, are somewhat conspicuous by absence. Here and there, no doubt, even in the vicinity of Thames Street, is some queer old hall with a garden; here and there is a graveyard, or a so-called square, or a school, or an almshouse, overshadowed by what even a rustic would recognise for trees; but for the most part, Commerce requires all the space for itself, and the standing-room of an umbrageous many-rooted oak would be eagerly bought for a goodly sum by Commerce. It is half-past six A.M.; and yet all is comparatively soundless and still in the favourite haunts of noisy Traffic. Not a waggon is rumbling down Queenhithe; not a curse is heard from Billingsgate; not a cry resounds on Fish Street Hill. No smoke from the house-chimneys yet rises straight up to heaven to bear witness that the weather is calm and settled; at least no smoke to speak of is yet discernible; for yesterday Capital departed from the City to West-end mansion or

country villa; and to-day weary Labour is taking its rest, and a lengthened term of refreshing sleep. What with the silence that reigns around, and what with the many massive chains that dangle from gallows-like cranes, a stranger, such as the celebrated New Zealander, might imagine that a general hanging had lately taken place, and that the inhabitants were, most of them, sleeping the sleep of death.

But soon the signs of general life appear.

Seven o'clock is clashed from a score of steeples, and Labour rises from its long sweet slumber.

Shutters are slowly taken down by yawning Labour in far from full-dress; windows are opened; heads are thrust out; and light-blue wreaths wriggle up from the chimney-pots.

On that side of Thames Street which abuts upon the river stands a house remarkable for its greater height, greater width, more doors and more cranes than any of its fellows can boast.

Whilst the clocks are still striking seven, a crew of Thames police pull slowly in front of that noticeable house, and, from mere habit, or for practice and just to keep their eyes in, cease rowing and scan the house from top to bottom. Their steersman waves a greeting with his hand, says something to his crew, who all look up to the point towards which he had waved his hand, and then gives the order to proceed, and the boat moves forward with a leisurely stroke.

To whom was the greeting?

A lattice-window at the very top of the tall building is open, and two hands, two arms, two shoulders, a head and a chest, all bare, are visible. The police, especially on the silent highway, see broad shoulders, muscular arms, and hairy chests so often, that the very familiarity must breed, if not contempt, at any rate indifference; but, in the present instance, the laugh with which the crew had received some pantomimic action on the part of their steersman—who, after an exchange of greetings with the apparition at the lattice window, had manipulated his own chest and arms in a plainly illustrative manner—showed that they understood him to be describing no ordinary phenomenon. As for the apparition's shoulders,

they are not so much broad as massive ; their breadth is quite manly enough, but it is for their solidity and the layers of muscle behind that they are chiefly remarkable. The owner of the head, chest, arms, and appurtenances thereof is a fair man, about thirty years of age, and standing about five feet ten inches. His head is covered with short, crisply curling chestnut hair ; he wears whiskers, beard, and moustaches, of the same colour and character as the rest of his hair ; his neck is like a bull's ; he has a straightish, shortish, broadish nose, a square forehead, prominent cheek-bones, and deep-set, flashing, determined, fearless gray eyes.

What his mouth and chin may be like cannot be readily decided, on account of their tawny covering ; but his teeth are large, white, regular, and sound, and seem capable of lifting, with the assistance of his powerful jaws, a matter of more than a hundredweight.

He is not exactly a handsome man, but a finer man is not often seen ; he looks the sort of man who might have risen to equivocal honour and princely wealth under the rule of Catherine the Second of Russia. His legs are fit to bear up the body of a Hercules ; his arms seem capable of wielding the implements of a Cyclops ; and he might well feel as if "himself pushing could move the chair of Idris."

He gazes steadily up and down and across the river, watches the elegant steamboats taking up position at the various piers, and with an air of satisfaction mutters : "Just the day for an outing."

Then he betakes himself to his washing, which commences with a full-length bath, to his scrubbing and to his dressing. As it is Sunday, he is more than usually particular ; he chooses his daintiest shirt, his smartest socks, his most brilliant necktie, his whitest waistcoat, and his newest trousers ; and, when he has put on all these articles, he walks abstractedly up to his bed, stands absorbed for a moment by the side of it, near the pillow, and suddenly turning away, throws himself into an easy-chair, saying, with a short sardonic laugh :

"I'm blest if I wasn't going to say my prayers ; that'll never do."

And so he sat a while, half-thinking, half-soliloquising :

"Why, I haven't done such a thing these fifteen years and more," he thought. "Early edgucation is certainly a rum 'un. My poor old mother always made me say my prayers, ending up with 'Our Father.' But it wouldn't do for me to say that now. She always used to make me say, 'Forgive us our debts,' 'cos, she said, 'trespasses' didn't seem to come home to a poor body, but 'debts' came home to everybody. Ha, ha, ha! Fancy Snoggins and Co. forgivin' debts! They'd forgive as many trespasses as you like, if you only pay up, but I've never known 'em to forgive a debt, and I don't think they'd die easy if they did. And I suppose I've caught it of 'em. I only know you can't get on in this world if you forgive debts; and I mean to get on. Besides, it's bad for the people that are forgiven—makes 'em careless—and if Master Perkins don't pay up afore a week's out, I'll have the lor of him as sure as he squints."

Hereupon the soliloquiser rose up from his chair with a frown of determination, finished his dressing, and strode slowly down a ladder-like staircase, let through the floors of successive rooms, until he came to the basement. As he touched the ground there leaped upon him from some sequestered lurking-place a huge dog, of no pure breed, but as like a Newfoundland as any other, which, without a bark or whine or warning of any kind, placed himself in the comer's path, and thrust his nose up towards the comer's face, resting his two front paws upon the comer's hips.

"Down, Grim, down; I've got my Sunday togs on, my boy," was the greeting he received, accompanied by a few hearty, sounding pats on the ribs.

Grim subsided immediately on to four legs, and marched soberly, gravely, and sternly along, with his tail only half-contentedly wagging, beside the man who had cautioned him.

This man was Thomas Triggs, once called, in his employer's family, Trusty Thomas; and the dog was his sometime friend and companion, and still his friend and property, commonly called One-eyed Grim.

Thomas held an undefinable position in the commercial

house of Snoggins and Co. Snoggins had for some years past slept with the only one of his fathers he had ever known, personally or by hearsay, anything about; and Co. had, in point of number only, for in wealth, influence, and self-importance that incarnate abbreviation had greatly increased and multiplied, dwindled down to an individual. But there are individuals and individuals. It sounds almost like disparagement to apply the term to George Pritt, Esquire, who, in point of size, might have been divided into two or three small men, and in point of business and riches, into a score of middling merchants. George Pritt, Esquire, had begun the world with fourpence, as he was fond of assuring anybody who differed from him on any subject whatever, and especially anybody who differed from him on money matters. He would also mention the fact at his own hospitable board, when there seemed to be no particular reason why he should, unless it were that either he desired his guests to calculate, during the process of digestion, how many fourpenn'orths they would, each of them, probably carry home under their belts, or his costly old wines had got into his vulgar old head, and made him bibulously garrulous. He was uneducated, as some people count education; but he could read, and what is much more, perfectly understand the money article in the newspapers; he could write such a hand as nobody who owed him anything had the least difficulty in making out, and he could cipher so well that he had nearly always done his sum, in his head, before those who traded with him had done theirs. And there his education stopped. But this was no matter for lamentation to him; he admitted his ignorance frankly; and he had been applauded to the echo at a public meeting (on account of a charitable object, to which he had for once in his life subscribed liberally), for a speech in which he had said:

"Ladies and gen'l'men, I'm not a scholar, I know, and I don't want to be; I find I can buy up most of them that are, though; and I can back myself to be a better man o' business, to turn two pound into four sooner, to give more to a worthy cause" (cheers), "and to make a lady a present of a 'andsomer

bracelit" (waving of handkerchiefs) "than a score of scholars wrapped into one."

He was tall, portly, red-faced, white-headed, and deceptively benevolent in appearance.

And Trusty Thomas was a man after his own heart.

Snoggins and Co. were, or George Pritt, Esquire, was, reported to be ahead of any other merchants in London who dealt in "sugar and spice, and all that's nice," in tea and coffee, and in pepper and mustard, and other pungent condiments which the ancient rhyme omits to state that "pretty girls are made of."

Trusty Thomas had begun his connection with Snoggins and Co. at the age of twelve in the humble capacity of errand-boy, an elastic term, which amongst competent persons, regardless of etymology and the true signification of words, admits of wonderful expansion. Thomas soon discovered that its meanings seemed to multiply as he grew in height and strength, until he, under the misnomer of errand-boy, was called upon to sweep out warehouses, clean knives and shoes and boots, lend a hand with heavy bales, do a little stable work, and, in fact, "make himself generally useful." Thomas, though he was not etymological by nature or education, took a broad, general view of his case, and concluded that, as more and harder work was required of and satisfactorily performed by him than was put upon him at the commencement of his engagement, he must be worth more pay. So one day, when he had been more than a year in his place, he expounded his views to the paymaster, who was at first very dull of understanding, and who, so soon as he found that he had fully mastered the proposition advanced by Thomas, said:

"Oh! that's what you want, is it? Well, now, I'll tell you what you'll *get*, if you come talkin' such nonsense to me agen for twelve months to come, and that's the sack."

But Thomas was a very bold boy.

He waited six months, and then made another application; he did not get "the sack," according to threat, but he got another rebuff and another admonition. This induced him to harden his heart, and take strong measures.

The next time, therefore, that he went to hold the horse of the carriage in which George Pritt, Esquire, sometimes drove down to business, he greatly astonished that portly merchant by taking off his cap and saying, respectfully and anxiously, but steadily :

" Please, sir, I want to speak to you, sir."

Whatever Mr. Pritt might or might not be, he was not proud or supercilious to his underlings whenever he was obliged to have anything to do with them personally. He looked surprised, no doubt, but he asked quietly :

" You're the boy Thomas Triggs, ain't you?"

" Yes, sir," was the brief answer.

" Come into the counting-house, then, as soon as you've taken the horse round."

And when the two met in the counting-house, Mr. Pritt, looking from his easy-chair on one side of his ample table across to the stout, well-grown lad, nearly fourteen years of age, standing, cap in hand, upon the other, was struck with his determined face and sturdy frame, and said, with an air of real interest :

" Well, boy, what is it?"

" Please, sir," said Thomas, clutching his cap with the tight grasp of resolution, " I wants more wages."

Mr. Pritt quite sympathised with anybody who wanted more money, but did not like it to be got out of *him*. It was, therefore, with a mixture of feelings that he asked a little petulantly :

" Why, pray? Eh, boy, why?"

" Please, sir, I'm double as strong as I was when I fust come, and I have to do more'n double the work; and I think I oughter have double the wages."

" You shouldn't come to me about such matters; you should speak to Mr. Pound."

" I have spoken to him, sir."

" And what did he say?"

" Well, sir, I've spoke to him twice; and both times he told me to wait, and said he'd turn me off if I didn't; and he may say the same agen; and so, says I to myself, I'll go straight to the 'ead o' the 'ouse, if I die for it."

"You may go now, and I'll see about it," said the merchant stiffly; but he was pleased with the boy's boldness in the pursuit of money, and with his evident reverence for the "head of the house."

The result was that Thomas had his wages and, as far as possible, his work doubled; for Mr. Pritt did not fail to impress upon Mr. Pound that Thomas was an exceptionally powerful and promising boy, and might easily be made to give money's worth.

And so Thomas had gone on from step to step. He had been made resident watchman, and had greatly distinguished himself in that post. And when he had been still further promoted to be the resident man in authority, having a watchman under him, he, with Grim, had done good service on the occasion of a burglarious attack, at the expense of an ugly slash across the head to himself, and of an eye to poor Grim. But his greatest feat had been even previously performed one night when Mr. Pritt and his family—as they would do sometimes, if they had to attend a civic banquet—had slept in Thames Street, and a fire had burst out on the premises of Snoggins and Co. Trusty Thomas had at that time placed Mr. Pritt and somebody else under great obligation by saving a life very dear to both.

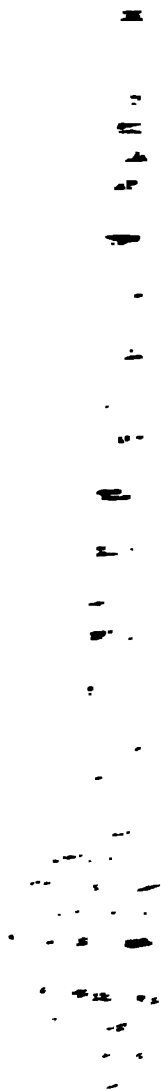
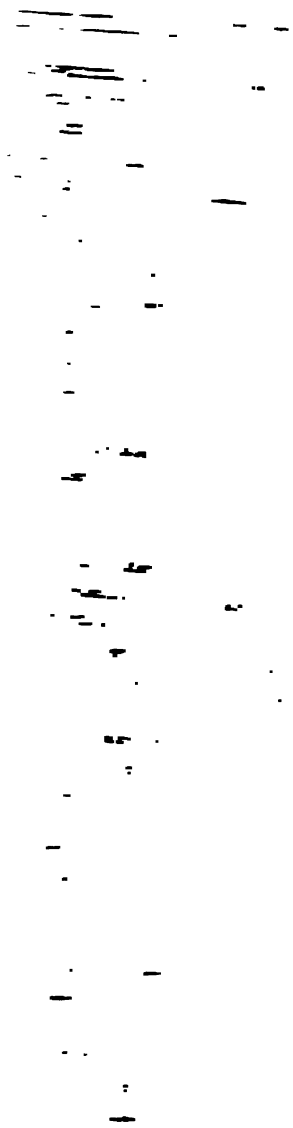
Moreover, reports had from a very early period reached Mr. Pritt, to the effect that Thomas was a very sober man insomuch that his mates laughed at him; a very saving man insomuch that he was a shareholder in several concerns; a very grasping man, insomuch that he would lend money, even to his fellows and subordinates, at high interest, and be relentless in the exaction of payment.

But all these reports rather gave Thomas favour in the eyes of Mr. Pritt, who felt for a fellow-creature intent on making money.

By degrees, therefore, Thomas had attained his present undefinable position.

Nobody could say what he was.

He had long ceased to be watchman; for, though he lived and slept in the house, there was, besides him,



CHAPTER II.

SUNDAY MORNING SERVICE.

TRUSTY THOMAS, or rather Mr. Triggs, for he was on his own dunghill, turned, with Grim at his heels, into a little room sufficiently well lighted by one pretty large window, looking upon the river, and having on the sill a box of sweet-scented flowers. Of furniture there was not much. A dingy carpet there was; an easy-chair stood close by the window; a few other chairs were scattered here and there; half-a-dozen prints hung upon the walls, and appeared to represent subjects highly interesting to flydom; and drawn up beside the easy-chair was a small round table, covered with a snow-white cloth, and supporting everything, except a tea-pot or coffee-pot, that a reasonable man would desire for a modest breakfast.

Mr. Triggs rang the bell.

Enter a scared-looking maid, whose presence is acknowledged by Grim with three thumps of his tail upon the ground. She bears in her hand a tea-pot which, without uttering a word or glancing to right or left of the spot on which it is to be deposited, she places carefully in the centre of the table; and then she wheels sharp round, and dashes towards the door as if she were a fair Sabine, pursued by an ardent Roman.

"Mary!" says Mr. Triggs, in his deep full voice.

"Sir!" cries Mary, with a start, a rush of blood to the face, and a convulsive clutch at the door-handle.

"Tell Mrs. Brett I shall not be home to dinner, and most likely not afore late to-night."

"Very well, sir," gasps Mary; and makes her escape to the regions where Mrs. Brett the housekeeper, Mary and her work-sister Martha, are "kept in stock," in case of domestic emergencies such as occasionally occur when Mr. Pritt has friends to luncheon, or the Misses Pritt, singly or together, condescend to pay a visit to Thames Street.

Mary delivers her message in the following improved version :

"Tom-cat, mum, says he ain't a-goin' to have no dinner 'ere to-day; and he won't go 'ome till mornin', mum."

Mrs. Brett smiles grimly, but reproves Mary for her "impudence;" and Martha remarks :

"Ketch 'im stayin' out late; I shouldn't like to stay out arter ten, and chance it, myself. He'd be 'ome and lock a body out, sure as gospel. And 'ow is he this mornin'—tame?"

"Uncommon tame; he a'most purred; he didn't scratch nor bite, nor even spit nor swear."

"Come, you gals," interrupted Mrs. Brett forbiddingly, "recollect Mr. Triggs is master here."

"Yes, mum," cried both girls with simultaneous servility, "and you're missis, as good as him any day; and now he's too proud to take his meals with you."

This was touching Mrs. Brett upon a very sore point; for there was a time when Thomas, before he became Mr. Triggs, had considered, or affected to consider, or been given to understand that he ought to consider it an honour that he was permitted to take his meals with Mrs. Brett.

And now he had a room to himself, and took all his meals by himself; and Mrs. Brett had to see to their preparation.

The reflection was pins and needles to Mrs. Brett; and her two handmaidens knew it, and made capital out of their knowledge, when they wanted to stay out late or do anything contrary to the rules of the house.

Meanwhile Mr. Triggs, totally unconscious of what was going on elsewhere, had been breakfasting leisurely. Having finished his breakfast he lit his huge meerschaum pipe, and

amused himself, or rather occupied himself—for his face now and then assumed an expression of anything but amusement—with a large note-book, wherein were many apparently interesting entries. He had just been poring over one which caused him to look as black as thunder, when a timid knock came to the door, and the double-faced Mary, at the sharp "Come in!" passed timidly into the room, saying:

"Please, sir, Perkins——"

"Tell Perkins to come in," was the reply, in a harsh and even threatening tone.

At the word of command there stepped into the room a queer little gray-headed man, with two bright, restless, furtive black eyes, which seemed to be running round and round with a view of getting up steam enough to enable them to jump so far out of their sockets as to look at one another over the intervening nose-bridge. He closed the door carefully behind him, and then stood with his back to it, twirling his rusty hat in his hand, and moving his legs about in the nervous fashion of a school-boy who has received a pressing but unwelcome invitation to pay a visit to the head-master's study after school-time for the nominal purpose of being "talked to."

"Sit down, Perkins," said Mr. Triggs peremptorily.

"Thankee, sir," rejoined Perkins, obediently sitting down, if the expression be correct, upon as little as possible of one corner of the chair farthest away from Mr. Triggs; and, smiling feebly, he continued: "I hope there's nothing the matter with your dawg, sir, but he's makin' a noise as if he wasn't quite right in his inside."

For Grim, whose chief business in life being in the night-watching line, had taught him circumspection, and the avoidance, when it was advisable, of loud demonstration, was not barking or snarling or growling, but emitting low, mysterious rumblings, something like those which you may hear when you stand close to an organ which has just ceased playing.

"He don't like *you*," said Mr. Triggs savagely; "and he's suspicious of yer."

"Dear me!" replied Perkins; "I'm sorry for that: I wish

him well, I'm sure. And I've known him in a distant sort of way a long while. How old might he be, sir?"

"He *might* be seventeen," answered Mr. Triggs sulkily; "but he's close upon ten."

"Oh! then he can't ha' bin more than four, I should say," said Perkins, looking kindly at him, "when he got his eye wiped, and——"

"Never mind the dog or his eye," interrupted Mr. Triggs sulkily. "Hold your noise, Grim, or I'll kick your ribs in. Now look here, Master Perkins, I wanted to see you to give you warning about that money. We've both of us plenty to do on a weekday without talking about those matters; and so I told you to come here this morning. You must pay that money before next Saturday."

"I don't see how I'm to do it, sir," began Perkins; but Mr. Triggs broke in fiercely, saying:

"Then you'd better get your eyes altered; that's all I can say."

This intentional or unintentional hit hurt poor Perkins, who was a very sensitive (and therefore, perhaps, unprosperous) man, severely, and he assumed a momentary air of almost dignity, as he remarked solemnly:

"God forgive you, Mr. Triggs, for jeerin' at His works!"

"Now, don't you try to shuffle off on the pious dodge," sneered Triggs. "I tell you I *must* have that money afore next Saturday; d'ye hear?"

"I hear, sir," answered poor Perkins, rising with a sigh; "it's twenty pound odd, Mr. Triggs, growed out o' five; it's like conjurin', that it is."

"If you were to put it off longer, it would grow bigger," said Mr. Triggs contemptuously.

"I shall have to sell pretty nigh every stick o' furniture," pleaded Perkins.

"I don't know anything about that," remarked Triggs coldly; "all I know is you'll have to pay."

"Suppose I can't, sir?" asked Perkins.

"Then I'll have the lor of you, by George," replied Triggs sharply.

"Good-mornin', sir," said Perkins, getting up and opening the door.

Mr. Triggs nodded carelessly; and poor Perkins shuffled out with the air of a man whose brains are wool-gathering.

Perkins had served the house of Snoggins and Co. faithfully for many a long year, and, though he was by no means a rolling stone, he had gathered no moss. He had received fair increase in wages, as most austere employers count fairness, but his family, for he had married early, had increased upon him, and, as long as they lived, had kept him in constant difficulties. He had now lost them all but one, and even to bury them had impoverished him. He had begun by patronising the errand-boy Triggs, and he had ended by becoming the debtor of the nondescript man, Mr. Triggs. For Triggs, the errand-boy, had many a time been taken home to tea by Perkins, and had watched the growth of the Perkins family and the by-no-means-proportionate increase of the Perkins property; and the friendless boy, grown thrifty man, had shown his gratitude by pressing a part of his savings at odd times upon Perkins, had shown a proper regard for the equally proper feelings of Perkins by charging a high rate of interest, and from the *protégé* had become the tyrant of Perkins.

And it was commonly believed that many another man employed in the house of Snoggins and Co. had come by similar means completely under the thumb of Mr. Triggs. And that thumb was chief amongst the spatuled digits of a hard hand. Chirognomists may be consulted as to what you may expect from the owner of such a hand.

Perkins, who was a church-going man, after having attended the earlier and secular morning-service at which Mr. Triggs officiated, went with his wife to his parish church. But his attention was far from strict during the prayers, psalms, and hymns, and it was only when the preacher, in stentorian tones, roared out the text, "Pay me that thou owest," that Perkins started with an electric shock, such as David must have felt at the words, "Thou art the man," and at once became absorbed; eyes, ears, mind, and soul were concentrated upon the utterances of the speaker. However, although Perkins

listened with all his might to the words that were thundered from the pulpit, and drew before his mental vision a very vivid picture in which Mr. Triggs had him tightly by the throat, he couldn't gather from what the preacher said that there was any scriptural way nowadays, except payment, of avoiding the clutches of the law, and he couldn't help wishing, with a heavy sigh, that he had lived in the days and the countries when and where the affairs of debtor and creditor were settled in the paternal or fraternal, or, at any rate, unlawyer-like manner, so eloquently descanted upon by the reverend gentleman. And, for once, poor Perkins left his parish church without having had his mind at all relieved. He tried to comfort himself during the afternoon by reading and pondering over that part of the patriarch Joseph's story which tells how the brethren found their money unexpectedly in their sacks' mouths, and over that part of the New Testament which relates how a fish was caught with money enough in its inside to pay tribute for two; but he found but small consolation. At last he opened his mind to his wife, who was a pious woman but not very fertile in resource. She, after copious weeping, sobbed out:

"There's people that think no more o' twenty pound than we do o' twenty pence; and yet it's ruin to us. Well, never mind, Perkins; Jehovah-jireh—the Lord will provide."

"That was a ram, that was," rejoined Perkins tartly; "it's different, I doubt, when it's twenty pound odd. I don't believe there's such a thing in Scripture as twenty pound odd. In fact, it seems to me that what we read in the Bible is much the same as 'Sindbad the Sailor' for all the notice people in general take of it; seems to me they carried on a different game altogether in those times; the good sort, I mean; the bad sort's much the same now as they were then, barrin' they're called Christians."

And Perkins lapsed into moody silence, whilst his wife sobbed herself into a fitful slumber.

Meanwhile, Mr. Triggs, after dismissing Perkins, had gone out, but not to church. Indeed, he objected to going to

church, and he did not hide his objections. "It's all a pack of rubbish," he said boldly; "I'm a Christian—of course I am, I was born so; but as for doing as they tell you at church you ought to do, you might as well shut up shop at once. And if you don't mean to do what you pretend to believe is all right, and what you pray for strength, and grace, and all that to do, you're a skulkin' and a lyin' hypocrite. They tell me there's a deal of Scripture been proved wrong lately, and it strikes me they'll find a deal more of it in the same box afore they've done, and then I may turn saint, but not afore—I can't afford it."

Grim had been anxious to accompany his master, but had been repulsed in a manner which had caused the dog to fling himself down with a thump and a howl upon the floor, place his head dejectedly between his front paws, and reflect upon the treatment of devoted servants. There was a time, alas! now long ago, when his master had not considered him an encumbrance, and had taken him out every Sunday to the green fields, such as his cynical soul loved. But now he served a hard servitude; as his master's position had improved his own had deteriorated; from week's end to week's end, month after month, year following year, he never went, unless a-shopping with Martha or Mary, beyond the threshold of the door, save in the yard, and its adjuncts, and upon the sort of terrace which hung over the river when the tide was up, and over the imitation shingle and mud when the tide was down. He had lost an eye in the service, but he got neither pension nor furlough. Still no feeling of disloyalty entered his heart, as he lay and reflected upon the days gone by. He was as ready as ever to render up his life for his master, if he did indulge in a few bitter thoughts. Some dogs, having been snubbed as Grim had just been, would have lain and moaned or whined, or howled for a whole hour; but, as their masters are, so very often are dogs. Grim, if he were not by nature, had grown by experience and association to be a hard, determined, practical dog. He had the whole spacious premises to roam over—warehouses, upstairs and downstairs, cellars, stables, extensive yard, and river-terrace. So, after two or

three growls of discontent, and a few vicious snaps at the too familiar flies, he got up, stretched himself, shook his head defiantly, and proceeded to make his rounds, looking as if he were fully resolved to take it out upon any stray cats he might fall in with, or upon any luckless living creature he might catch trespassing. Thus, no doubt, he hoped to find balm for his wounded feelings.

As for Mr. Triggs, he went down to the wharf hard by, and made his way to a certain steamboat.

CHAPTER III.

A HAPPY DAY.

ADVERTISEMENTS are usually about as much to be depended upon as dreams ; and, according to advertisements, " Rosherville is the place to spend a happy day." There is every reason, moreover, to believe that the advertisements do not mean to confine the happiness to a week day. At any rate Mr. Triggs was not the man to waste a week day in spending it happily. And the happiness, if any, he expected to derive from his trip to Rosherville may have been entirely independent of the advertisements or the place. One would certainly have said that it ought to be, seeing what occurred the moment he stepped on board ; for, from " abaft the funnel," as the nautical dogs aboard of river steamers have it, there skipped forward to meet him a sweet-looking girl, some twenty years of age. It was a lovely day in June, but she was not at all " like a red, red rose that's newly blown " in that glorious month ; she would have reminded one rather of the delicate honeysuckle, than which she was no less graceful and no less creamily and softly tinted, and she looked no less sweetly simple, and no less naturally formed for clinging to some support, and adorning the support to which she clung.

" Oh Tom ! " she cried, as, instead of the usual greeting, she took hold of his right arm with both her little hands, and squeezed it, whilst they walked along, " I'm so glad to see you ; we thought you would be late."

"*We!*" exclaimed Triggs, with a frown: "you don't mean to say you've brought Mrs. Maggitt!"

"To be sure I have," was the somewhat reproachful answer; "you can't have wished me to come here alone, dear Tom; and besides, I couldn't leave poor aunt by herself."

"Upon my soul, Leila," Mr. Triggs began, "I didn't expect"—but what it was he didn't expect was not distinctly stated, for he and Leila had now reached the spot where sat an elderly dame of so highly respectable and severe, not to say forbidding an appearance, that anything approaching to even gaiety, let alone impropriety, seemed to be utterly impossible within the range of her cold and glassy eyes. She rose as the pair drew near to her, gave her hand with formal solemnity to Mr. Triggs, and answered his brief and gruff "*Mornin', mum; how are you?*" with a series of measured sentences, ejected as if she were unburthening herself of separate apophthegms:

"*Good morning, Mr. Triggs; I hope you are well; I can't say much for myself; this is a lovely day; how lucky we are; I'm sure we shall enjoy ourselves.*"

It is quite certain that she did not intend her last remark to be considered facetious; but it provoked a sardonic laugh from Mr. Triggs, who observed pointedly, as he looked straight in Mrs. Maggitt's face:

"Well, it'll not be *my* fault if we don't."

Whether Mrs. Maggitt thought that the laugh was uncalled for and offensive, and that the observation contained a satirical inference against somebody in particular, she did not declare in words, but she began to lead up towards the general enjoyment by putting on the expression of face generally worn by persons who encounter a particularly objectionable stench, and she answered all questions addressed to her either by Leila or Mr. Triggs, who sat between her and Leila, monosyllabically, as far as possible, and between her teeth.

When they arrived at Woolwich, and the enjoyment had reached such a height that there was no interchange at all of words between the three, and that Mrs. Maggitt looked as if she were sitting as a model for the portrait of a worthy but decidedly sour-faced martyr, whilst Mr. Triggs had assumed

a fearful scowl, and Leila had the film of tears in her eyes, there came on board a dapper, gentlemanlike man of unquestionably military bearing.

He was short and spare, but deep enough in the chest; he had a noticeably upright but, at the same time, easy way of holding himself; he wore in his frank, open, calm, rather melancholy eyes the expression of one who was more accustomed to receive than to show deference, and who was perfectly convinced that manliness, especially in these days of scientific gunnery, is quite independent of bulk and sinew. He had a face perfectly free from hair, with the exception of a small, glossy, well-trimmed moustache; and there was about his legs and his walk a something which told of intimate acquaintance with horseback.

He was dressed with plainness, but good taste; everything he had on was of the most correct material and cut, but in no respect was fashion carried to any extreme. In his scarf was a probably valuable but certainly unpretentious pin; and his gold watch-chain, when it could be seen below a small portion of his cutaway coat, appeared to be good and massive, but was by no means showy. He held his gloves in his hands, which were well shaped and well kept, but unornamented by jewelry, with the exception of one solid signet-ring on the little finger of the left hand. In the manner in which he handled his simple cane there was something irresistibly suggestive of the soldier; and, had he been asked for his card, few people would have been surprised to find that he bore a commission in the cavalry.

He seemed at first to be a little uncertain where he should take up his position; but, after a short survey, he appeared to be decided by some reason not unconnected with Leila, and, as there was no room to sit down, he was obliged to stand. He took up his post hard by Mrs. Maggitt, lighted a cigar, and smoked placidly. He assumed an easy, unconstrained attitude; his cane slid naturally under his left arm, his left hand dropped naturally upon his right wrist, his legs fell naturally into a sort of stand-at-ease position, and he did not contract his brows or wear that fierce or self-conscious look which is always more

or less characteristic of the man-milliner or lawyer's clerk, or the like, who consider it incumbent upon them to let it be surmised from their postures that they are at the very least full privates in some company of volunteers. Indeed, it was remarkable that, so soon as he was observed to have settled himself, several "smart young men," who had hitherto adopted a not altogether dissimilar attitude, stared at him steadfastly for a few moments, as if they were engaged in mentally instituting a comparison, and then, shifting their sticks or umbrellas out of the semi-military position, and letting their legs straddle freely abroad after their more habitual style, evidently gave up any idea of competition.

He himself took scarcely any notice of anybody, and, though he now and then glanced in Leila's direction, never verged in the least upon rudeness; but, for the most part, he studied the horizon with an expression of profound self-satisfaction. Moreover, although he puffed out considerable volumes of smoke, he never spat—which cannot be predicated of the other smokers on board.

As for Leila, she regarded him from time to time with mingled curiosity and amusement; and, when their eyes accidentally met, she withdrew her gaze so coolly as to show that she was not very much interested, and without that blush which tells a tale sometimes of gratified vanity and sometimes of involuntary homage. Her life had been such as to make her consider that between the dapper gentleman and herself there was a great gulf fixed, which she had never dreamt was passable; that there were distinct orders of human beings, and that the distinction must be kept up; that in the sphere in which she moved elegance might sit well enough upon a woman, but was ridiculously ill adapted for a man; and in her secret heart she could not help comparing the fine, massive proportions, powerful head, workmanlike hands, and evidences of restless energy exhibited in the very manner of Triggs, with the dapper gentleman's slender build, neat but small frontispiece, delicate fingers, and quiet and almost sleepy composure, and comparing them to the disadvantage of the latter.

But Triggs, not knowing what was passing in her mind, and erroneously thinking, as most men do think, that pretty women will put up, for want of a better chance, with the work-soiled, rough, unsophisticated, or rather unveneered man, but are always set in a flutter by and, in their secret hearts, dote upon the white-handed, smooth-spoken, polished gentleman, fumed and fretted accordingly. And yet he might have thought of one woman, the remembrance of whom should have given him the lie; but, if he did think of her, he regarded her as the exception.

As for the dapper gentleman, he had scarcely bestowed a single glance upon either Mrs. Maggitt or Mr. Triggs, and the admiration with which he from time to time eyed the unappreciative Leila was tempered, and languid, and careless, as if he should have said: "You're a very pretty girl, upon my word, and I'd sooner kiss you than break my leg."

However, he had been but a very few minutes in the place he had chosen for smoke and contemplation, when Mrs. Maggitt began to sway about from side to side, and backwards and forwards, and to moan in a way which caused Mr. Triggs to ask angrily:

"What the devil's the matter *now*, mum?"

"I'm going to be sick," answered Mrs. Maggitt, in a tone of determination, which seemed to render remonstrance useless.

"You must recollect, mum," Mr. Triggs therefore remarked with resignation, "that this ain't a Margate boat, and they don't count on it, nor keep basins."

"The nasty smoke," snarled Mrs. Maggitt.

Her explanatory remark had a strange effect upon Triggs. His over-clouded visage cleared at once, and he looked like one who has unexpectedly found a way out of a difficulty. He rose up hastily, and, confronting the dapper gentleman, said harshly and insolently:

"You can read, I suppose?"

The other started slightly with surprise; then, having taken a calm and smiling survey of his questioner, answered with perfect good temper:

"Oh! yes—a little; can I be of any assistance?"

"Then you can read *that*," rejoined Triggs roughly, with one hand twisting the dapper gentleman half round, and with the other pointing to a printed notice.

The dapper gentleman, having politely disengaged his arm from the grasp of Triggs, having removed his cigar from his mouth, and cleared his throat, read, after the manner of a tutor explaining a difficult sentence to a school-boy, the following words :

"No—smoking—allowed—abaft—the—funnel. I suppose it's 'abaft' that puzzles you; it means 'in the after-part of the vessel'—'behind the funnel'—just where we are now, in fact."

"Do you call yourself a gentleman?" roared Triggs furiously.

"I never call myself names," answered the other mildly.

"I tell you you are annoying a lady by smoking where you have no business to," vociferated Triggs.

"That is a very different matter," said the other quietly. "Pray where is she?"

"There," replied Triggs, with a motion of the hand as applicable to Leila as to Mrs. Maggitt. The dapper gentleman, therefore, took a step or two forward, and with a courteous inclination of the head, said directly to Leila :

"I am very sorry to have annoyed you."

"Not me, sir," rejoined Leila coldly; whilst Triggs, more angry than ever, waved his hand towards Mrs. Maggitt and growled :

"*That* is the lady you annoyed, sir."

A smile trembled for a moment upon the dapper gentleman's lips as he turned towards the strange specimen of a lady, but it speedily vanished, and could hardly have been perceived.

"I ask a thousand pardons," he said gently. "I would not have annoyed you for the world;" and, as he spoke, he hurled his half-smoked cigar over the heads of the people into the river.

Mrs. Maggitt, having succeeded in attracting to herself that notice which she greatly coveted, was mollified at once;

but, to keep up appearances, she coughed, tapped her chest, and gulped once or twice; she then smiled feebly, and panted out:

"You shouldn't—have thrown—away—your beau—tiful—cigar, sir."

"No business to smoke *here* at all," growled Triggs.

"If you'll look round," remarked the dapper gentleman good-temperedly and even deprecatingly, "I think you will see that I was by no means the only offender; the rule seems to be generally disregarded."

"That's quite trew, sir," assented Mrs. Maggitt; "and the way they spit, the nasties! ugh!" and she folded her hands together over her knees, and leaned forward in a manner which made the dapper gentleman think that she was going to carry out the intention she had, though he was not aware of it, already expressed.

The dapper gentleman forthwith hurried away, spoke a few words to a boy-man dressed in the style of a mock midshipman, and, after the lapse of a few seconds, the mock midshipman appeared with a tray, on which was a glass filled with some amber-coloured fluid. This glass the dapper gentleman presented to Mrs. Maggitt, requesting her to oblige him by sipping it, as it was a mixture which he had often found efficacious under circumstances similar to the present. She complied with several coughs, sighs, and head-shakings; and handed back the glass with apparent reluctance to the mock midshipman.

"*I* pay for that!" cried Triggs insolently, to the mock midshipman, who simply rejoined, "Paid for a'ready, sir," and, touching his cap to the dapper gentleman, walked hastily away.

Mr. Triggs never liked to pay for anything if he could help it, but for once he was annoyed at having, as it were, saved money. He was wild with rage to think that his plan for getting rid of the dapper gentleman had not only failed, but given an opening for nearer approaches. He therefore had recourse to further insolence, going close up to the dapper gentleman, and exclaiming:

"Come, we don't want any of *your* favours, Capting Jinks, or whoever you are."

"Jinks!" exclaimed the dapper gentleman, with a smile of amusement.

"Ah," rejoined Triggs, "Capting Jinks, o' the horse-marines—that's about your size, I should say."

"No such corps in the service, I assure you," said the dapper gentleman solemnly, as if he were imparting serious information; "but if you really wish to know who I am, and have anything to say to me, here is my card; for the present, I wish you good-morning."

And with these words the dapper gentleman sauntered easily away, leaving his card in the hand of Mr. Triggs, who had sullenly accepted it.

Mr. Triggs sat down in his place, read the name and address, and for a while gazed silently at vacancy. At last he turned to Leila, and said coolly:

"Leila, that's Capting Davies."

"What, the Captain Davies?" she asked, with interest.

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"Why, here's his name and regiment, and the place where he's living; and I know as much about him as that."

"I am rather glad of that, Tom," answered Leila, a little timidly.

"Why?" asked Triggs brusquely.

"Well," replied Leila coaxingly, "you don't like him, I can see; but I think he's just the sort of husband for Miss Lurline."

"He'll make her money fly, with his horse-racing and betting, if that's what you mean," said Triggs, with a short savage laugh.

"I'm sorry for that," rejoined Leila simply; "I only meant that he seems a nice, good-humoured, handsome fellow."

"You'd better get up and go after him, then," said Triggs fiercely.

"Tom!" cried Leila, flushing, "whatever do you mean?"

"Damn him ! *I* say," growled Triggs ; " I'd pitch him into the water as soon as look at him."

Leila gazed at Triggs in mute surprise ; and gradually her eyes filled with tears, to hide which she turned away her head, so that her face was set in the direction taken by Captain Davies.

"So you *must* look after him, then," sneered Triggs brutally ; and, at these words, poor Leila hid her face in her hands, and fairly sobbed.

At this sight Mrs. Maggitt appeared to be suddenly transformed ; all her asperity and peevishness vanished like a breath ; and, having whispered to Triggs, " You had better let me come there," she took the place which Triggs, with a coarse mocking laugh, relinquished.

No tender mother could have soothed her daughter more quietly, feelingly, and effectually than Mrs. Maggitt soothed Leila.

"Hush ! darling," she whispered, " remember we are not at home. You know his rough, hasty ways ; he's as trew as steel, but as hot as mulligatawny. He don't mean what he says."

Yet it was generally held, amongst those who had dealings with Triggs, that he most decidedly did mean what he said, and that, if he did let passion get the better of him, it must be in the case of something unconnected with commercial affairs.

At last Rosherville was reached ; and the three who had come out for a happy day, and commenced so well, went on as they had begun ; they left happiness farther and farther behind. They strolled in the gardens, and found it dull ; they dined in the Gothic Hall, and found it duller ; they sat in an umbrageous arbour, and found it dullest. Moreover, they encountered Captain Davies, whose slight proffer of recognition, as he put two fingers to the brim of his hat and smiled pleasantly, was acknowledged by Mrs. Maggitt only ; for Triggs merely swore, and Leila turned away her head and pretended to be reading one of those moral reflections with which the pedestals of statues or flower-vases are so appro-

priately furnished in Rosherville Gardens. After this meeting the gorgeous parrots might as well have been obscene birds of prey, and the singing birds have been croaking ravens. Even tea in a shady alcove, with prawns and shrimps and cream and all manner of fruits, failed to produce any cheerfulness; for Triggs was surly and Leila broken-hearted. Oddly enough, Mrs. Maggitt was the most cheery of the three; for she was one of those women who are crabbed at only those times when there is nothing philanthropic for them to do, no plague to be stayed, no breach to be healed. The greater part of her life had been passed in making herself a receptacle for the spleen of others, who, in their troubles, used her sympathetic soul for their relief, and, afterwards, thought as little about her as, to use her own words, they would have thought about a convenient spittoon. Many a time, when virulent contagious disease had tried and found wanting the love of affectionate friends and relatives, had she alone stood bravely between the dead and the living, or the sick and the sound, until all danger was past. And what had been her reward? Sometimes large and sometimes small pecuniary recompense, but, in either case, no lasting attachment. It is true that she wanted the money; but few nurses would have been so gentle, so patient, so completely devoted to the sick and suffering. And the sick and suffering either died or recovered; and, whether it were the former or the latter, it had been her fate, contrary, it is to be hoped, to general experience, to find herself almost equally ignored. "You see, my dear," she had more than once said to Leila, in a moment of bitterness of spirit, "people don't like to have the besom that swept up the muck constantly under their noses;" and thus she had grown crabbed; but the crabbedness was all outside—it vanished as soon as her feelings were touched. So now it had completely vanished, and her smile was quite arch, and her voice almost musical, as, after failing to establish any sort of general conversation, she rose up hurriedly from the tea, which had been finished almost as soon as begun, and said:

"Two's company, three's none; I shall go and take a stroll, and leave you two dummies to find your tongues."

"Don't go away, mum," said Triggs, adding with rough pleasantry, "there's the capting and all sorts of wild young chaps about."

"Oh! nobody will be rude to an old woman like me," she rejoined with perfect temper, and walked briskly away.

When she returned, it was plain that her good intentions had borne no fruit: Triggs was still sulky, and Leila was still sad. Her reappearance seemed to be quite a relief to them.

"I've had about enough of this," said Triggs, yawning: "I vote we go."

Mrs. Maggitt and Leila at once assented.

They had managed to drag on "a happy day" until it was far advanced; and they now took steamboat for London, where they arrived about 8.30 p.m. Mr. Triggs saw Mrs. Maggitt and Leila into a certain omnibus, and, having wished them a gruff "Good-night," and added a promise to "look them up" before long, departed.

CHAPTER IV.

A LOCK-OUT.

MR. TRIGGS, having performed the offices of gallantry, did not go straight home to Thames Street. He paid a visit to a crooked lane not far from St. Paul's, and ascended a staircase which loomed through a beetling, gloomy, arched doorway. On either side of the doorway were names, English and foreign, painted in black letters upon a yellow ground. He went up to the second floor, and stopped at two doors, of which one was black and thrown open against the wall, and the other was brown, having the appearance of polished oak, and was shut close. On the inside of the black door there was printed in huge white letters, "Mr. Dan Tribe;" and on the outside of the brown door was a smart brass knocker, with which Mr. Triggs performed pretty vigorously. In about two minutes he heard a shuffling of feet and a volley of oaths, indicating that somebody was not desirous of visitors, and the door was opened by a clerical-looking man, so far as solemn countenance, white tie, and black clothes are clerical. But if he were a clergyman at all, one would have said, judging from the flush upon his face, the slight unsteadiness of his gait, the clay pipe in his mouth, the explosion of execrations with which he had heralded his coming, and the remark with which he greeted Mr. Triggs, that he was probably undergoing a temporary suspension from his functions. Moreover, at sight of his visitor, he took his pipe out of his mouth, and exclaimed unclerically:

"Dash my buttons, if it isn't Mr. Triggs! Come in, come in."

"You've been drinking, Dan," said Mr. Triggs calmly, when he had followed the speaker into a comfortably-furnished room, and they had seated themselves opposite to one another, on either side of an open window.

"I'm happy to say I have," assented Dan Tribe cheerfully; "and I'm going to drink more. You'd better join me; it's 'the good Rhine wine,' and there's a glass on the table close by you."

Mr. Triggs shook his head impatiently.

"*Gieb mir blut der edlen Rebe,*" observed Dan Tribe sententiously, as he poured out a bumper.

"What the devil are you talking about?" snarled Mr. Triggs.

"About the vine, the noble vine," replied Dan Tribe: "what says the great authority? why:

See, Varus, that thou plant no tree
Before the sacred vine
About the walls of Catilus,
And Tibur's soil benign.

Oh, Mr. Triggs, if you were only a scholar!"

"You are, ain't yer?" sneered Triggs.

"I hope so, I hope so," responded Dan Tribe complacently: "I had a university education."

"Much good it's done yer," growled Triggs: "taught yer to drink."

"And a precious good thing too," assented Dan: "for listen once more to the great authority:

For Heav'n made all things hard for them
Who moisten not their clay;
To put to flight devouring care
There is no other way."

"You're drunk already," remarked Triggs superciliously.

"Excuse me, Mr. Triggs," said Dan, with an assumption of dignity; and then he added with a leer, "I remember the Sabbath-day, Mr. Triggs, to keep it wholly."

"Holy? you scoundrel!" cried Triggs with a guffaw.

"I didn't say holy, Mr. Triggs," rejoined Dan with a grin, "I said wholly: I go the whole hog, you know."

"Now, look here," said Triggs severely, "are you sober enough to talk over a little business?"

"It all depends upon the sort of business," replied Dan with great frankness, "if it's anything intricate I'm not up to it; but if it's to bully any poor devil who can't pay, I'm your man; in fact," he added with a bitter laugh, "I'm best at that sort of thing when I'm three-parts gone."

So Dan put aside his bottle and glass, and sat talking with Triggs for about two hours; and, as he showed the latter out at the door, he remarked:

"All right, Mr. Triggs: I'll squeeze Master Perkins, you may depend. I'll squeeze him tighter than if he was a good-looking young woman of five-and-twenty. And, by-the-way, how do things look at the West End?"

"Pretty well," answered Triggs briefly.

"Ah!" rejoined the other with tipsy gravity, "'a man shall leave father and mother and cleave unto his wife'—that is, if she has plenty of money. That is a quotation appropriate to the day, I think, Mr. Triggs?"

"You're quite a Church Service, Dan," replied Triggs laughing.

"And the house, Mr. Triggs?"

"Ah!" answered Triggs, shaking his head, "there's no saying how that may go."

"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, Mr. Triggs," observed Dan with a leer.

Triggs was silent for a while; and then he asked, sharply and sternly:

"What odds will you lay against the double event, Dan?"

"Odds, Mr. Triggs," answered Dan sententiously, "I leave to members of Tattersall's, idiots, and"—here he looked particularly cunning—"officers in the army."

Triggs regarded him fixedly, and said sternly:

"When the wine's in the truth's out; don't you get talking with other people about my affairs, friend Dan."

"I! Mr. Triggs," replied Dan with drunken solemnity
"far be it from me; for the authority says:

But blow no Berecynthian horn,
No madd'ning cymbals shake:
For after them doth blind Self-love
Come following in the wake,
And Brag with far too lofty air,
The empty-headed drab,
And, more transparent than his glass,
The confidential Blab.

No, Mr. Triggs, I'm no blab."

"Good-night, then," said Triggs sulkily, as he set off home, where he arrived at ten minutes to eleven.

"Where is Mrs. Brett?" he asked Martha, who opened the door.

"Gone to bed, sir."

"Very well; then lock up the house; bring me the keys; and go to bed yourself." But Martha hesitated.

"Do you hear?" asked Triggs, with a most fearful scowl: "bring me the keys here at once: what's the fool waiting for?"

"Please, sir," said the pale and trembling Martha, in a scarcely audible voice, "Mary's not come in yet."

"Oh ho!" cried Mr. Triggs. "Now then, you lock up the house and bring me the keys, and *take the bell off*; and be off to bed."

"But about Mary, sir?"

"Ten o'clock's her time, and she knows that well enough. Come, do as I tell you."

"You wouldn't lock her out, Mr. Triggs!" pleaded Martha.

"Do as I tell you," said the inexorable Triggs, "or I'll do it myself."

"Bent the watchman, sir, would let her in," pleaded Martha once more.

"Bent has no business in this part of the house until everybody has gone to bed, as you very well know; and I keep the keys," said Triggs impatiently: "come, be quick."

"Oh! think of a respectable, nice-looking girl like Mary,

Mr. Triggs; and she don't know nobody near here as'd take her in; I don't know what she'd do," whimpered Martha.

"Mary knows the rules, and must take the consequences," rejoined Triggs sternly. "You do as I tell you."

"Then I won't do it, if you murder me, Mr. Triggs," cried Martha, in a sudden burst of hysterical passion: "I'd sooner——"

But Triggs listened to no more words: he put Martha, not over-gently, aside, and walked downstairs into the kitchen, whilst Martha, in obedience to a furious "Go to bed, do," from Triggs, fled precipitately in another direction. As Mr. Triggs entered the kitchen, which was lighted by gas, his quick eye perceived a tremulous movement of a cupboard-door, and at the same time read the meaning of the *two* chairs at the kitchen-table, the *two* plates still bearing traces of bread and cheese, and the *two* tumblers not thoroughly drained of porter. He took three rapid strides, pulled open the cupboard-door by main force, and, after a single glance, said through his clenched teeth:

"I thought so: come out, Master Bent."

The man addressed at once came slinking out; and, without a word of self-defence, said very humbly:

"I hope you don't mean to lock Mary out, sir?"

"You be off to your proper place, and do your own duty," was the rough reply.

Bent hesitated, but only for a moment. He shut his mouth tight, and went.

In the twinkling of an eye Mr. Triggs had turned off the gas and locked the house-door, having previously *taken off the bell*.

As he turned away from the door to go to his own part of the house, the last stroke of eleven was sounding from the nearest church-steeple. And at the very same moment his ear caught a peculiar sound: *Thrum!*

Mr. Triggs laughed to himself.

Thrum! Thrum! came the sound again, as of a bell-wire without a bell; and again Mr. Triggs laughed, but went leisurely on his way.

Thrum! Thrum! Thrum! Thrum! once more came the sound, indicative of alarm; but it, as well as the accompanying bump of a knob against a doorpost, grew fainter and fainter, and at last quite inaudible, whilst Mr. Triggs mounted to the warehouse upon the second-floor, muttering:

"I'll teach 'em to take liberties, just because I happened to say I shouldn't be home till late."

Meanwhile, Martha had gone to bed, sobbing because she could not assist, even by words of advice, the belated Mary, for the servants' sleeping-room was in a spot from whence it was impossible to communicate with the street from the window. And she couldn't descend and whisper through the keyhole of the street door, for there was an inner-door which was likewise locked.

CHAPTER V.

A MAD DOG.

MR. TRIGGS, as has been said, mounted to the warehouse upon the second-floor. The room, like all the other rooms, had folding-doors which opened upon the river, and through which all kinds of sacks and bales were hoisted up from or lowered down to the barges and other vessels below. Mr. Triggs unfastened the doors, flung them wide apart, and let in the cool night-air. He lighted a pipe, stood in the doorway, and watched the moonbeams dancing upon the waters and giving a reflected beauty to the ripples of even grimy Father Thames. All on a sudden he heard a patter as of paws, and at his side stood Grim. The dog laid something down at his master's feet. Mr. Triggs stooped and examined the something, which turned out to be a huge cat, dead as a doornail.

"Ah! Grim, my boy," he said, patting the great creature, "so you've had some sport, eh? Good dog, then, good dog!"

Grim wagged his tail to express appreciation of the compliment; and gave the dead cat a posthumous worrying.

"But we can't have this thing here, you know," Mr. Triggs remarked, as he spurned with his foot the carcass at which Grim was still sniffing. "We must get rid of it, Grim, and so it's no use," continued Mr. Triggs, seizing the cat by the tail to fling it into the river, whilst Grim protested with many abdominal rumblings.

Down went the cat; and Grim, with a howl and a bark of forced acquiescence and friendly remonstrance, watched the

process with much interest, cocked up his ears at the hardly audible splash, and, immediately afterwards, dropped down upon the floor with a thump, laid his head sideways upon his front-paws, and appeared to be doing a problem connected with the velocity of sound, or the insecurity of property in cats.

Somebody had passed through the room during this little episode; but it was only Bent, the watchman, of whose presence Mr. Triggs had been altogether unconscious, and Grim not unconscious, but, as a brother-officer, tolerant.

In the spectacle of the enormous cat, carried along by the swirling river at a rate which, through the shimmering light upon the water, seemed even greater than it really was, and bumped here against a barge, and there against a wherry, and twisted round and turned topsy-turvy by the chain of an anchor or other obstacle, there was something so congenial to the nature of Mr. Triggs, that he had gone right out of the warehouse on to a sort of platform that he might have a better view. The platform had but a hand-rail, and that only on one side, to protect anybody who might turn dizzy on the undesirable standing-place from a sheer drop into the water, which, though the tide was unusually high, was still a long, long way below, and was running with a tremendously strong current. But Mr. Triggs, who, so far from having any personal experience of dizziness, whether arising from intemperance or any other cause, would probably have been unable to define the meaning or even to spell the word, was standing with his hands in his pockets, his pipe in his mouth, and his feet not many inches from the edge of the platform, one arm leant against the hand-rail, his legs crossed, and his back towards the warehouse. In a position to command both the platform and the warehouse by an adroit use of his one eye aided by his two ears, lay Grim. The cat had long disappeared, and still Mr. Triggs stood on his precarious perch, as a stranger would have thought it, and smoked and pondered. And his looks grew black as thunder at the thoughts of his "happy day," and especially of Captain Davies. He wondered that such a "swell" should go to Rosherville at all, and he

muttered with a scowl and a coarse laugh, "You'll not ride rough-shod over *me*, I can tell you, Master Capting."

Hereupon Grim set up his ears.

Was it because of his master's laugh?

It could hardly be that: for he, at the same time, turned his head towards the inside of the warehouse. Presently his tail went noiselessly from side to side as the tail of a dog that recognises somebody, not an enemy. Then a man, wearing goloshes, or list shoes, or something noiseless, and having in his right hand a policeman's truncheon, and at his belt a dark lantern, stole cautiously along, close to the wall, until he came to the doors leading out on to the narrow platform.

It is evidently Bent the watchman; for Grim, though a little surprised, apparently, at Bent's unusually stealthy manner, makes no objection, but assumes an air of great alertness.

Bent, with a somewhat uneasy glance at the dog, whose muzzle he must pass to arrive on the platform, meets with no opposition from Grim, and gets well upon the planks within two yards of Mr. Triggs.

Mr. Triggs has his back turned to Bent, in the careless attitude already described, and stands within a few inches of the clean drop into the water.

The moon is beclouded; only a few stars glimmer; and the river sounds hungrily below.

It is only a little comedy, perhaps, or a brief pantomime that Bent is performing; but, before he is within an arm's length of Mr. Triggs, he raises his truncheon, and clenches his teeth, and rises a-tiptoe as one who would strike with all his might.

But Grim has been accustomed to connect such attitudes and gestures with tragedy, and, with one low growl and two rapid springs, he has his friend Bent by the ear and collar—teeth in his ear, and paws in his collar.

A cry, a curse, and a slash with the truncheon from Bent follow the growl and the rush of Grim; and Mr. Triggs turns swiftly round.

He was rather pale, and the moonlight made him look

paler than he was ; but he said quite calmly, after a moment's pause :

"Oh! it's you, Bent, is it? Why, you've got your truncheon out, as if you expected burglars. Down, Grim, down! you mustn't hurt Bent; down, that's a good dog; why, what the devil's the matter with him?"

"The dawg's mad, Mr. Triggs," roared Bent; "I'm blest if I don't drownd him."

And he plied truncheon, and hand, and legs; but Grim held on like grim death.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SISTERS.

Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother. . . . And the names of them were Aholah the elder, and Aholibah her sister. And Aholah . . . doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours. . . . And when her sister Aholibah saw this . . . she doted upon the Assyrians her neighbours, captains and rulers clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them desirable young men.

On that same Sunday afternoon, when three persons were unsuccessfully attempting to spend "a happy day" in the fallacious gardens of Rosherville, two young ladies were passing the postmeridian hours after their kind in the drawing-room of a spacious house, distinguished by an unusually long portico, at Notting Hill. The young ladies might have sat for imaginary portraits of Aholah and Aholibah; for they were both somewhat Jewish in physiognomy, and decidedly mundane and unspiritual in appearance and expression. Their names, however, were not at all scriptural; for the elder was called Marietta, shortened into "Mari" or "Etta," and the younger Lurline, or, familiarly, "Lurley." But what is in a name? Aholah by any other name would have been equally reprehensible; and Aholibah by any other name would have equally followed her sister's example. But then Aholah and Aholibah didn't stop short of outrageous deeds; Marietta and Lurline did. In fact they would not have outraged fashion on any account; and they knew that, according to fashion, young ladies may look like what they

must not be; they may wash themselves with curious washes, they may paint their eyes, and they may deck themselves out with all sorts of trickery; but, so long as they wish to be well with society, the washes, and the paint, and the trickery must mean no more than any other sort of sham.

Marietta and Lurline, in fact, were but ordinary girls of the period, save that their physical gifts were extraordinary, and enabled them, in no small degree, to appear by almost unassisted nature as externally striking, if not fascinating, as most of their fair contemporaries exhausted all the resources of art to appear. They were not only Christians but professed members of the Church of England, having been, as Mr. Triggs said in his own case, born so. They had been, that very morning, to divine service, during which they had themselves exhibited the most exemplary behaviour. They had, however, been the cause of much irreverent attention upon the part of others both of their own and of the opposite sex; nor, for all their exemplary behaviour, had they failed to see and to enjoy the admiration plainly kindled in the breasts of handsome men, and the envy, hatred, and malice conceived and partially betrayed by pretty women. They had no fear lest by their "broidered hair, and pearls, and costly array," they should raise misgivings in the mind of their minister; for he was, in the estimation of his wealthier parishioners, a not only truly pious but also truly sensible man, with very sound opinions about doing your duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call you, and with a happy knack of explaining away any passage of Scripture that seems to bear hard on the rich man—so happy a knack, indeed, that it carried immediate conviction to the mind of anybody predisposed to take the same view. Besides, they had shut his mouth, if not his eyes, by their liberality; for they resembled those persons of whom it was said that "they of their abundance have cast into the treasury." They possessed a superfluity, and they gave away with winning grace a part of what they didn't want; and as that part, though small compared with what they had, was in itself considerable, they were regarded by those who do not measure charity by the amount of self-

denial it entails, as downright charitable. They were in perfect accord with their judicious minister's doctrine that Sunday ought to be differently kept by different persons, according to the station of life in which it has pleased Providence to place them. Beer and skittles were distinct Sabbath-breaking, especially if they were supplied at a place of public entertainment; but any kind of elegant drink, and elegant amusement, such as champagne, or brandy-and-seltzer-water, taken at any hour of the day in a private house, amidst cheerful scenes, was perfectly legitimate. So was a stroll in the Zoological Gardens, and so was a little flirtation in the pleasant shades of Kensington Gardens; which two amusements take amongst the wealthier classes the place occupied amongst the poorer by skittles and kiss-in-the-ring.

Nor could the good minister see any harm in a little pleasant music, provided that you had a grand piano in your own house, and somebody amongst your own family or friends with talent enough to perform upon it; but, if you didn't possess that expensive combination of things and persons, it would be an undoubted piece of Sabbath-breaking to assemble with several thousands of your fellow-creatures in the open air, and hear some military or other music at a cheap rate, or for nothing at all. By "pleasant music" the worthy minister, if he contemplated anything a whit livelier than the Old Hundredth "played quick," probably meant something written by some composer best known for his treatment of sacred themes, and would, at any rate, have drawn the line at Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words;" and he would have been very much astonished, not to say shocked, had he known the number of ells to which his inch of concession was stretched by Marietta and Lurline. They, having attended morning service, and fulfilled their religious duties in such soft but thrilling tones, with such brief and furtive but telling glances, and in such costly but becoming costume as, they were delightedly conscious, had disturbed the devotion of many a susceptible man, and many an appreciative woman, thought, "What more is required of us?"

Luncheon, of course; but then, after luncheon? A stroll in the garden, a siesta, or a bout of conversation. The weather was too hot for a stroll, but it was not oppressive enough for a siesta; so they settled down to conversation. Visitors, with the exception of an occasional man of business who wanted to see their "papa" rather than them, and whom they preferred that their "papa" rather than themselves should see, seldom or never called on Sundays. Their "papa" had gone out some whither, immediately after luncheon, but in what direction, or for what purpose, they neither knew nor cared; "mamma" they had none; and so they were not likely to be disturbed in their possession of the drawing-room. What with blinds scientifically arranged, what with double windows, closed towards the public thoroughfare, and wide open towards the conservatory, through which one passed into the spacious garden, and what with solid walls, and thick carpets, and a profusion of furniture, there was subdued light provocative of soft day-dreams, there was cool shade, there was refreshing air, and there was an absorption of sound which not only made sweet, low, languishing tones seem sweeter, and lower, and more languishing, but also served to make undistinguishable to the ear of passer-by or listening neighbour the true nature of the gayest and most mundane airs that might be evoked from musical instrument or warbled by still more musical voice. The sisters reclined, rather than sat, each in her favourite low chair, beside the open window leading into the garden; each, in her ample flow of delicate drapery, looked light and cool and airy as a cloud-clad nymph; and each, with every movement of a "Spanish fan, swayed to and fro with more than Spanish grace," as the novelists say, showed with what taste, judgment, and skill they were superintended by their dressmaker.

It has been said that both were of a somewhat Jewish physiognomy; but Marietta, the elder, was of the black-haired, dark-eyed, swarthy type; Lurline, the younger, was of the fair-haired, gray-eyed, lily-like type. All Lurline's motions were poetry, as some people count poetry; and, as she leaned back and gazed with earnest eyes upon a portrait

hanging on the wall within a short distance of her chair, she might have been taken for the very image of Aholibah, when she "saw men portrayed upon the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermillion." And, indeed, the portrait was of a man in scarlet uniform.

"*Ah ! Qu'il est bien !*" she said, with an accent, a gesture, and a look, which somewhat recalled the manner of the celebrated Grande Duchesse de Gérolstein.

"How absurd you are, dear!" observed Marietta, laughing, and in a tone of mock-reproof, "that is only a lifeless portrait, though certainly," she added with a sneer, "the original seems to me to be a cold creature enough."

"You think so, do you?" rejoined Lurline carelessly.

"Is he a *very* ardent lover, if it is not an impertinent question?" asked Marietta slyly.

"Now, don't be inquisitive," answered Lurline with an arch smile; and, again fixing her eyes upon the portrait, she murmured:

"Oh! that those lips had——"

"Language, of course," interrupted Marietta; "that would be very nice, just like Cowper's mother; and I'm sure the poor man hasn't too much of it."

"He certainly doesn't talk much," said Lurline quietly, whilst her eyes assumed a far-away, dreamy expression, and a slight flush tinged her cheeks.

"Perhaps he can put his lips to a better purpose," remarked Marietta mischievously.

Lurline smiled.

"Besides, I don't think he's clever," continued Marietta.

"Perhaps not," rejoined Lurline contemptuously; "but he's handsome, and he's a gentleman;" and she looked hard at her sister.

"Gentleman!" sneered Marietta, not, however, meeting her sister's gaze: "there are plenty of silly, finikin gentlemen."

"And he can waltz your soul almost out of you," Lurline went on; "and he can sing almost as well as Gardoni, and he can—he can—oh!—he can do lots of things."

"What, for instance?" inquired Marietta, with a provoking air of incredulity.

"Well, he can—fight," answered Lurline, as she sprang up with sudden sprightliness, sat down at the piano and rattled out:

"Ah! que j'aime les militaires,
 Leur uniforme coquet,
 Leur moustache et leur plumet!
 Ah! que j'aime les militaires!
 Leur air vainqueur, leurs manières!
 En eux tout me plaît,

Quand je vois là mes soldats
 Prêts à partir pour la guerre,
 Fixes, droits, l'œil à quinze pas,
 Vrai Dieu! je suis toute fière!
 Seront-ils vainqueurs ou défaits? . . .
 Je n'en sais rien . . . ce que je sais . . .
 C'est que j'aime les militaires,

Etc.

Je sais ce que je voudrais . . .
 Je voudrais être cantinière!—
 Près d'eux toujours je serais
 Et je les griserais!

Avec eux, vaillante et légère,
 Au combat je m'élancerais!
 Cela me plairait-il, la guerre? . . .
 Je n'en sais rien . . . ce que je sais . . .
 C'est que j'aime les militaires,"

Etc.

"Brava! bravissima!" cried Marietta, as Lurline resumed her reclining position: "but for my part I don't care for the military—especially the officers, all fal-lal and lardy-dardy."

"What dreadful slang you talk, Etta," said Lurline languidly; and then, kissing her hand to the portrait she added: "did you ever hear such slanders, darling?"

"My notion of a soldier," resumed Marietta, "is one of those grand fellows like the rough Romans of the Republic, or like the grenadiers of Frederick the Great—above all

things, a *man* and not a *dandy*," and her dark eyes flashed fire.

"Oh! there are numbers of that sort still," observed Lurline superciliously, "massive and Herculean, and rugged as the Hyrcanian bear. But for all the pretty tales about Beauty and the Beast, about Samson and Delilah, about Antony and Cleopatra, and so on, I do not admire gigantic brutes, whatever *you* may do;" and she gave her sister another steady look.

"Thank you, darling," rejoined Marietta, once more avoiding her sister's gaze: "but I don't think either you or I would be quite so regardless of the proprieties as the ladies you have mentioned were; you see we live under the wing of Mrs. Grundy, and must sacrifice everything to respectability."

"Exactly, dear," assented Lurline, laughing: "I didn't mean anything at all shocking; but there are even nowadays giants in the land who might not have insuperable objections to the ceremony of marriage; I have one in my mind's eye now."

"Really!" exclaimed Marietta, with an assumption of cold indifference.

"Yes, really!" continued Lurline archly; "a tawny giant, a regular Salamander too, who thinks nothing of walking through fire and rescuing distressed damsels, in the dead of night, from the devouring flames."

"Don't talk nonsense, Lurley," said Marietta sternly.

"Shall I tell you how you look, Etta, whenever you see him?" proceeded Lurline. "Oh! your eyes tell *such* a tale. But I must not speak to you prosaically, I must sing to you what they say; only he's not a soldier, you know."

And once more she sat down to the piano, and she sang, with a cooing voice, with much expression and an occasional sigh of simulated emotion:

"Dites-lui qu'on l'a remarqué
Distingué;
Dites-lui qu'on le trouve aimable;
Dites-lui que, s'il le voulait,
On ne sait
De quoi l'on ne serait capable!"

Ah ! s'il lui plaisait d'ajouter
 Des fleurs aux palmes de la gloire,
 Qu'il pourrait vite remporter,
 Ce vainqueur, une autre victoire ;
 Dites-lui qu'à peine entrevu
 Il m'a plu !
 Dites-lui que j'en perds la tête !
 Dites-lui qu'il m'occupe tant,
 Le brigand !
 Tant et tant que j'en deviens bête !
 Hélas ! ce fut instantané !
 Dès qu'il a paru, tout mon être,
 A lui tout mon cœur s'est donné !
 J'ai senti que j'avais un maître !
 Dites-lui que, s'il ne veut pas
 Mon trépas,
 Dites-lui (nous parlons pour elle)
 Dites-lui qu'il rependra : Oui !
 Dites-lui
 Que je l'aime et que je suis belle ! "

Once more she resumed her seat, and Marietta said laughing: "Upon my word, Lurley, you sing these things better than that brazen woman we heard at the theatre: you'll never want a profession as long as questionable operettas are in vogue."

"Thank you, dear," replied Lurline languidly; "but I must say I don't wonder at the Salamander's having made an impression, the circumstances were so romantic. It must be so queer to be carried off in the dead of night by a handsome Salamander. You must have thought that the times of knight-errantry had returned, and—but, by-the-way, you fainted, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did," answered Marietta pettishly.

"Ah! then, of course, you might just have well have been a nonentity, so far as any thinking was concerned; and perhaps you were both pumped on by the fire-engines, which is not at all knightly. Were you?"

"Never mind whether we were or not," answered Marietta, laughing; "but I hear papa's knock: he will want to take us out for an hour in Kensington Gardens; so we had better go and dress."

They dressed, and took their walk in the gardens, and carried home with them the proud satisfaction of having created a sensation and of having caused great havoc amongst those of the loungers who were not of their own sex. About half-past seven they reached home, and they had scarcely descended to the drawing-room, on their way to dinner, when a servant announced :

“Captain Davies.”

The gallant Captain was very cordially received by everybody. He was evidently the original of the portrait which had employed so much of Lurline’s looks and thoughts; and the manner in which he and she exchanged greetings would have told the least curious and least experienced observer that there was an engagement between them.

“You haven’t been to church, you wicked man,” said Lurline, rather approvingly than disapprovingly, to the gallant Captain, as soon as they were seated at the dinner-table.

“Well, no, I haven’t to-day,” he assented, with an emphasis on the last word, as if to imply that he was generally a regular attendant; “you know I had to dine with the fellows at Woolwich yesterday and sleep there; and, as we kept it up rather, I wasn’t awake very early this morning. So I couldn’t go to morning service, and nobody goes in the afternoon, you know; and in the evening, you see, we’re always at dinner, like this. Ha! ha!”

“And pray what have you been doing?” asked Lurline. “I insist upon knowing.”

“Gad! I’ve spent a happy day,” replied the gallant Captain, with an air of amusement; “and I had a small adventure. Ha! ha! ha!”

Lurline looked a little serious.

“A happy day away from me!” she exclaimed, bridling; “and an adventure! Pray was there any lady in the matter?”

“Well, I don’t know about ladies,” rejoined Captain Davies, with imperturbable good humour; “but there were *two* persons of your sex in the matter.”

Lurline looked rather black as she asked :

" Pretty ? "

" One was and one wasn't. "

" Young ? "

" One was and one wasn't. "

" Tell me what she was like ? "

" Which ? "

" Oh, *you* know : the pretty one, of course. "

" She had lovely, soft, light hair, and, I believe, blue eyes ; but they might have been any colour almost (except black or brown), for they seemed to change about under the long lashes, and the most delicate complexion in the world, and a tearful look that comes over a fellow. "

Lurline looked vexed, and coughed as if her throat were husky.

" Lurley's jealous, " said Marietta merrily.

Captain Davies burst out laughing.

" If there were any reason for that, " he said frankly and easily, " you may depend upon it I should have shown a little more strategy, and not spoken out so freely. "

Lurline's brow cleared.

" Come, tell us all about it, " she said vivaciously, " I long to hear some more about this lovely damsel. "

Captain Davies thereupon made extremely merry over his little adventure ; and he described with all the gusto of one who was a good judge of manly proportions the appearance of the rough customer to whom he had given his card, concluding with the words :

" The man, of course, was not a gentleman ; but he certainly couldn't be called exactly a snob ; he was a fine sort of fellow in his way, only an unmannerly brute. "

Lurline, when she found how insignificant a part was played by the blue-eyed damsel, had taken but small interest in the recital, though it occasionally made her laugh heartily ; but Marietta had, by degrees, grown quite wrought, and at the end, she looked deadly pale as she asked :

" Then you didn't learn his name ? "

" Not I, " answered the gallant Captain carelessly, " those

fellows don't seem to carry cards; all I know is that the pretty girl called him 'Tom' and 'dear Tom,' and it seemed to be a regular case between them."

Marietta said nothing; but she received this information with so strange an expression of face that Lurline said gaily:

"Why, Etta! one would say that *you* were jealous *now*."

But Marietta had turned her head round to give an order to the servant, and did not appear to have any answer to make.

"I've heard what you was a-saying, Capting," observed the host, "and your description 'd just suit my confidential man o' business, only I know *he*'d never be found gallivanting about to Rosherville."

Lurline shot, like lightning, a look of intelligence across to Marietta, who, however, had turned towards her father, and said quietly:

"Saul was found amongst the prophets, papa."

"Ah!" cried her father, with a coarse laugh, "and that's where Tom Triggs is to be found—amongst the profits; ha! ha! but not amongst the pretty gals at Rosherville, ha! ha! ha!"

For our old acquaintance, Mr. Pritt, was the owner of the large house with the portico at Notting Hill; and Marietta and Lurline were his daughters. And in a week or two Lurline was to become Mrs. Davies.

CHAPTER VII.

TWO PARTNERSHIPS DISSOLVED.

WHEN Mr. Triggs had with difficulty induced Grim to release his hold of the watchman's gullet, an opportunity was given for Bent to speak; and

"Blowed if I know what's come to that dawg, Mr. Triggs," said he, with a tremulous voice and a ghastly grin; "he seems to have forgot old friends. Here, boy, come and make it up," he continued, taking a step towards Grim, and stretching out his hand as if to caress the dog. But Grim had been watching both men attentively, and was, no doubt, a skilful physiognomist. He declined the proffered caress, and, displaying all his formidable teeth (and they were still very formidable, for all his ten years of age), would have been at the watchman's throat again, had not Triggs interposed and even grasped the dog by the collar.

"There's something wrong, you see, Bent," remarked Triggs coolly.

"I don't know what it is, sir," said Bent, cowering. "He must be off 'is 'ead; he ain't safe, the dawg ain't."

"No, he ain't," assented Triggs; "not for *you*, at least. Now, look here," he added sternly.

Bent looked unsteadily at Triggs.

"I've advanced your wages," said the latter, "for a long time past."

"Well, you've charged pretty 'cavy for doin' of it, Mr. Triggs," whimpered the other in an injured tone.

"And now you're so far behindhand," continued Triggs, "that you might as well be on half-pay allowance."

"Well, sir," rejoined Bent humbly, "you got off with the start, and you've made the runnin' so strong that there's been no chance o' ketchin' up, and now I'm fairly distanced, I must own."

"That's some of your sporting gibberish," said Triggs; "and I expect your money has gone in the sporting line; and because you've been fool enough to lose your half-crowns, you consider you owe *me* a grudge."

Bent made an attempt to deprecate this statement, but Triggs cut him short, saying:

"Bah! I know what you curs are like. You think you owe me a grudge, I tell you; and you owe me another for locking out Mary to-night."

Bent involuntarily grasped his truncheon more tightly. Triggs observed the movement and said contemptuously:

"What do you keep that truncheon out for?"

Bent, without a word, replaced it in its sheath.

"Come here," said Triggs peremptorily, as he stepped back to the place he had occupied upon the platform.

Bent followed sulkily, whilst Grim kept close by him, and rumbled inwardly without ceasing.

"What did you come up so quietly for?" asked Triggs.

"Well, you know, Mr. Triggs," said Bent eagerly, "I always wear my felt shoes on duty, sir; and seeing the place open here as I was a-going my rounds, sir, I were bound to see if there was anythink up."

"But you saw that Grim was quite easy, so you might have known that it was a friend, if anybody was here; besides you're not dumb, and might have called out."

Bent was speechless.

"Now look down at that water," said Triggs, taking Bent by the shoulder; "don't be afraid; I'll not pitch you in—this time."

Bent looked down, and didn't seem to like it.

"I can't swim, and you know it," Triggs went on; "but even the best swimmer wouldn't have much chance with such

a drop and such a tide as that, more partic'lar if he'd 'ad a good crack on the skull to start with."

"I don't see what that's got to do with *me*, Mr. Triggs," said Bent doggedly.

"You were fool enough," Triggs went on, "to think that Grim wouldn't interfere with you, cos you're sort of friends and partners. But you're not his master, and he knows it; *I* am, and he knows that. He'll never trust you again."

"It's all a mistake, I tell yer, Mr. Triggs," said Bent vehemently; "and what's come to that confounded dawg, *I* don't know. Why he's a-goin' on like anything *now*."

"If it wasn't that you owe me a grudge about your wages, and about Mary, and what not, and that you had your truncheon drawn, and that you did something to set Grim's dander up, I might think there was some mistake somewhere; but now!" he thundered, clutching Bent suddenly by the throat and forcing him down upon his knees, "even if you'll kneel there and swear by the heaven above you that you didn't mean me any harm, I'll say you're an infernal liar!"

Grim seemed to understand the case, and, with ears cocked and slowly wagging tail, showed tacit approval.

Bent scowled and merely muttered:

"Come, don't choke a feller, Mr. Triggs."

Triggs let go his throat, and told him to get up and be off about his business.

"You'd better call Grim to help you," he cried ironically as Bent slunk away; "whistle him, man, whistle him."

Bent produced a feeble, undecided whistle. Grim cocked one ear, but took no further notice.

"Go with him, good dog!" said Triggs coaxingly; but Grim, having wagged his tail at the well-loved voice, flopped down upon the floor with one short, sharp, discontented bark.

"I see how it is," muttered Triggs; "I can't trust you two together; I must turn watchman again myself for to-night."

In a few strides he reached the retreating Bent. Grim

followed close at his heels and kept up an incessant rumbling.

"You see," said Triggs, "he'll have nothing to do with you. D'ye hear that growl? It means that Grim won't be partners with *you* any more. You'd better go home, Bent; you'll be no more use here—after this."

"Very well, Mr. Triggs," said the man doggedly.

"Hand over that truncheon," growled Triggs; "and then I'll see you off the premises."

"I must get my other togs on anyhow," muttered Bent, as he handed over the truncheon sullenly.

"Very well; only be quick about it," assented Triggs; "and Grim and I will wait for you at the door."

Bent was so long about changing his togs that Triggs was on the point of carrying out a threat of going to help him when the former suddenly appeared. Triggs looked fixedly at his anxious, cadaverous face, and asked between his teeth:

"What infernal villainy have you been up to *now*?"

"I ain't done anythink, Mr. Triggs," whined the man.

Triggs eyed him dubiously; and, just saying "Wait a minute," he opened the street-door a few inches and looked carefully up and down the street.

Bent oscillated visibly, as if he were divided in his mind whether he should stay or make a sudden bolt for it. But between Bent and the aperture were not only the stalwart figure of Triggs, whose back, however, was turned to him, but also the couchant, vigilant, defiant body of Grim.

The odds were decidedly against Bent.

Presently Triggs lifted up his hand and made signals. Bent moved more restlessly than ever, as if he *must* push by into the street; but Triggs, observing him, said sternly: "Stand back," and Grim, with upper-lip wrinkled and white tusks prominent, snarled a warning.

Soon there was a clatter of heavy boots, and a policeman stood at the door.

"Come in, please," said Triggs civilly; and the policeman, who saluted Triggs deferentially, but as an old acquaintance, obeyed.

"Look here, policeman," said Triggs; "I want to show you something. You know what friends Bent and Grim are?"

"Rather," exclaimed the policeman, with a knowing look.

"Now, see here," continued Triggs; and he told Grim to give Bent a paw; but, the moment Bent held out his hand, the dog went into a paroxysm of fury, as if Bent had offered to strike him.

"Well, that *is* a rum game!" exclaimed the astonished policeman. "What's up?"

"Just come over the bottom premises with us," was the only reply Triggs made; "come along, Bent."

Bent obeyed at a snail's pace; and Triggs, the policeman, and Bent went carefully over the lower premises, whither Bent had been obliged to go to "change his togs." Triggs examined every nook and corner; but there was nothing unusual to be seen. There was the trim, elegant steam-engine which turned the many wheels which ground the many condiments which were a great part of the Eldorado worked by Snoggins and Co.; but all was now still; and nothing was out of its place, not even the earthenware vessel containing the water for the slaking of Grim's thirst during the small hours. But Grim, not being thirsty just now, and having Bent upon his mind, passed it by without even dipping his muzzle into it. When the search was ended, and the searchers had once more reached the street-door, Bent, with something like a sneer, but with an air of great relief, said:

"Well, Mr. Triggs, you didn't find anything."

Triggs, without noticing the remark, addressed the policeman, saying:

"Keep particular watch on this place to-night, policeman, and the moment you see a handkercher or anything flying from our flag-staff on the top of the house, don't you come to see what's the matter, but send the nearest fire-engine."

Bent burst out laughing.

"You think I've set the house a-fire," he said hysterically. "That *is* a good un."

"You can go," replied Triggs sternly.

"The sack, I suppose?" asked Bent carelessly.

Triggs nodded.

"What for?" cried Bent, a little insolently.

"Come here to-morrow morning at ten, and you shall know," replied Triggs coolly. "Can you be here, policeman?"

"Oh, I'm your man," answered the policeman.

"You're a hard man, Mr. Triggs," whimpered Bent, shuffling off: "a very hard man, you are. God forgive you!"

"God forgive *me*!" roared Triggs after him. "Ha! ha! ha! God forgive *you*, you mean, you murderous villain! Don't go, policeman."

Triggs then gave the policeman a brief but graphic account of what had taken place; whereat the guardian of the peace was so impressed that he could not express his feelings otherwise than by elevating himself to premature beatification with an emphatic "Well, I *am* blest."

"You'll be here to-morrow at ten, then?" said Triggs.

"Sure as eggs, sir," replied the other, as he resumed his beat.

Triggs took the watchman's lantern and truncheon, and once more entered upon the old familiar duties from which he had risen to his present position. He missed not an inch of the premises in his desire to learn whether Bent had been "up to anything," as he could have sworn was the case; but he could find no sign. Suddenly he missed Grim.

He whistled. No Grim.

He whistled again. No Grim.

He called him angrily by name. No Grim.

With a muttered oath and threat, he strode along to the spot where Grim was wont to lie, the spot close by the earthenware vessel. Yes, there was Grim.

But the dog was lying still and rigid, and there was a foam about his mouth.

And Triggs now knew what Bent had been "up to," and what had made him look so ghastly. For Bent was quite aware where the poison was kept.

And so another partnership was dissolved: Trusty Thomas and one-eyed Grim were separated for ever. And Triggs was almost moved to tears.

"He shall pay for this, old man; I swear he shall," said Triggs, quite softly for *him*, as he patted the body of his faithful beast.

CHAPTER VIII.

PERKINS SEES A GHOST.

THE week which had commenced with "a happy day" for so many people was waning, and Perkins, although he had received more than one pressing invitation from Mr. Dan Tribe, had not yet been able to avail himself of the kind offers made to him, notwithstanding that Mr. Tribe had expressed his intention of sacrificing himself entirely to the convenience of Perkins, and holding himself ready to receive "at any hour of the day or night" (as the wording of his note was) the little account due by Perkins.

Thursday had but a few hours' existence left, and poor Perkins had not yet begun to have a glimmering idea as to how he should solve the problem of getting blood out of a stone. He had been sent on this Thursday evening with a parcel and a message to Mr. Pritt's house at Notting Hill. He had left the parcel, and was returning, by way of Kensington Gardens, to his own dreary home. The evening was lovely; there was a gentle breeze which fanned his feverish forehead, and seemed for the time to blow away his gnawing cares; the rustling leaves had a soothing sound, the calm blue sky looked fresh and friendly, the pleasant glades opened their arms to receive him, and he determined to accept the welcome they proffered.

But he had not penetrated very far into one of the least frequented grassy walks, when he came to a sudden standstill, and his very toes turned up with astonishment. Yet all that

there was to be seen would have appeared to an ordinary observer a common sight enough for Kensington Gardens. Two iron chairs; on the chairs two persons of the opposite sexes. The chairs were certainly very close together, and the heads of the occupants, in hat and bonnet, were even closer still; but the phenomenon is to be seen daily in those pleasant gardens, and most people would have regarded it, if not indifferently, at any rate without starting as if at the appearance of a ghost.

Perkins, however, clearly sees a ghost.

He shrinks back affrighted, but fascinated. He creeps behind a tree, but cannot take his eyes off the apparition.

After a lapse of some minutes the sitters rise from their chairs, walk a dozen paces or so, glance furtively around, become for a few seconds an indistinguishable mass of hat, bonnet, boots, and drapery, part asunder as if with a wrench, and the wearer of the bonnet walks with a stately but hasty step in one direction, whilst the wearer of the hat, frequently turning round to watch the fleeting drapery, and hoping perhaps, but in vain, for the further adieu expressed by a fluttered handkerchief, saunters slowly away in another.

Perkins remained in ambush until they were both out of sight. When they were quite gone, he walked up to the two iron chairs, cautiously and gingerly, as if they might be dangerous. He examined them curiously, as if he expected to find upon them some explanation of the vision that had startled him. He even sat down upon them, one after the other. But the only effect of that movement was that he had to pay twopence (one of the chairs having arms) to a human lynx, wearing a uniform and a sort of wallet, who had been observing him from a convenient umbrageous lurking-place, and pounced upon him just as he was thinking how liberal somebody was with chairs. The payment of twopence reduced Perkins to a melancholy and meditative condition, which made him open his legs, place an elbow upon each knee, clasp his forehead with both hands, and take a hopeless survey of the ground underneath his chair.

He sees, almost hidden in the long grass, a something

which his feet and legs must have perfectly concealed from the gaze of the human lynx.

He picks it up. It is a lady's pocket-book. He turns it round and round; he smells it, to find out whether it is Russia leather; he ponders over it as if it were a puzzle; at last he opens it. His face flushes scarlet, as if he had been detected in doing something wrong; but he goes on as if he were under a spell, and peeps at the contents. His squint becomes awful; his eyes sparkle; his hands tremble as he refastens the clasp. He clenches the pocket-book tightly in his hand, and reflects for three minutes. In three minutes he has formed a resolution which makes him turn pale. He thrusts the pocket-book violently into his breast-pocket, leaps from his chair, and starts off homewards like one possessed.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. TRIGGS CHANGES HIS ABODE.

ON the Monday morning succeeding that Sunday on which Mr. Triggs had spent his "happy day" and resumed for once the watchman's office he had so long relinquished, he had, nevertheless, been at his place in the counting-house betimes, and had made every preparation for the scene which would take place if Bent should "come up to time," between Messrs. Pritt, Triggs, Bent, the policeman, and the dead body of Grim, at 10 A.M. or thereabouts.

The policeman, as good as his word, appeared to the minute. Not so Bent. A quarter of an hour, half an hour, three-quarters of an hour had gone by since 10 A.M.; but there was no symptom of an approaching Bent.

Mr. Triggs smiled sardonically.

He had never read Shakespeare, and never intended to waste his time in doing anything of the kind; still, his thoughts, if put into words, would have been exactly expressed by:

"Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all."

He firmly believed that Bent never intended to return at all to the house of Snoggins and Co.; and he rightly interpreted Bent's intentions. Mr. Triggs would not have been surprised at a man's running right into the lion's jaws in pursuit of wages; but then Bent's wages, as both Mr. Triggs and Bent himself were well aware, were already forestalled to almost the

last shilling. And Dan Tribe had custody of a little document which would make all that clear.

Mr. Triggs, therefore, having waited an hour, and having fully agreed with the policeman in an opinion expressed at the very first by that functionary, in the judicial language habitual amongst "the force," to the effect that "the cove had 'ooked it," and wouldn't "come up to the scratch," at once sought the presence of Mr. Pritt; and the three remained in consultation for a long while, a considerable portion of which was spent by Mr. Pritt in requesting the divine blessing for his soul, and in apostrophising the "great heavens above" and his "goodness gracious."

Ultimately Mr. Pritt was introduced to the dead body of Grim, and expressed himself as being "perfectly satisfied," but whether with the decease of the poor dog or something else did not clearly appear. He, however, left to Triggs the duty of making all necessary arrangements for a new watchman and, if necessary, a new dog; and then retired to imitate the royal personage of whom it is written that he "was in his counting-house, counting out his money." But, just before he closed the door, he said a little nervously:

"By-the-way, Triggs, I should like to see you when you are at liberty."

"Certainly, sir," replied Triggs easily, though he was not altogether without a suspicion of what was coming, inasmuch as he had observed that Mrs. Brett, the housekeeper, had been admitted to an audience with "the governour," and had returned from it wiping her eyes in the triumphant fashion of a woman who is conscious of not having wielded woman's watery weapons ineffectually. As soon, therefore, as he had made things pleasant (at the expense of "the house," of course) for the policeman, and sent that officer away rejoicing and praying for a similar "rumpus" every night, he repaired to Mr. Pritt's private room.

"Oh! jest take this chair, Triggs, will yer?" said Mr. Pritt, actually condescending to place one for his trusty henchman.

Triggs bowed and sat down without a word. He was calm

and cool, and though sufficiently deferential in manner, yet perfectly independent and unperturbed in bearing. He was, as has been said, a very fine man; and, as he now sat, he looked his very best. The sunbeams, playing amidst the crisp brown hair upon his head and lips and cheeks and chin, gave to the whole an appearance of burnished gold; his gray eyes flashed in the glorious light; and, as he settled himself in his seat, with his brawny shoulders thrown back, his deep chest prominent and his powerful hands resting on the two arms of the chair, the excellence of his manhood apparently struck his employer. For Mr. Pritt, without speaking, looked at him steadfastly for some moments as a spectator looks admiringly at a noble picture; and then, with a short apologetic sort of laugh, said:

"The fact is, Triggs, that Mrs. Brett, the housekeeper, you know, came to me complainin'; and—and—I said I'd—I'd speak to you about it."

"About what, sir?" asked Triggs respectfully.

"Well, it's something about locking a gal out last night. Eh?"

"Well, sir."

"Did you—did you look a gal out?"

"I did, sir."

"Oh, you're master here, of course; and I'm satisfied—perfectly satisfied; but I promised to speak to you about it, and I should just like to have your account of the matter."

Triggs gave his account sternly and succinctly, and ended up by saying:

"You know, sir, we *must* be partic'lar in a 'ouse like this; and if I keep the rules I don't see why a pack o' servants shouldn't. It's all very well to say the other gal could ha' sat up for her, or Bent could ha' let her in, but 'ow do we know what time she might ha' kep the other gal up to? And what's more, we don't want the watchman to be lettin' in the female servants or bein' in their part o' the 'ouse (where I caught Master Bent) at all. I was in before eleven, and Mary ought to ha' been in; if anybody's to 'ave a little law I ought.

Besides, it isn't as if they didn't know my rule: not in, locked out; that is, unless special leaf's asked for."

"Quite so, quite so," assented Mr. Pritt, "but there's a knock at the door. Come in!"

Enter, curtsying, Mrs. Brett, who, ignoring Triggs, says directly to Mr. Pritt:

"Please, sir, there's a man called for Mary's box and things."

"Eh?" cried the bewildered old gentleman.

"The poor gal as was locked out, sir," said Mrs. Brett in explanation.

"Oh! she's took herself off in a 'uff, ha! ha! ha!" roared the old gentleman; "well, she may have her things, I suppose, eh, Triggs?"

"If she's not coming back, I suppose she can," answered Triggs; "but the man must show a written order or something to let us know it's all right."

"There it is, sir, and in Mary's own handwritin', as I can swear to it anywheres," said Mrs. Brett, still carefully ignoring Triggs, turning her back upon him and addressing Mr. Pritt only.

"Let him have 'em, then," cried Mr. Pritt testily.

"Please, sir," added Mrs. Brett timidly, "there's more written just here, sir——"

"Well, read it," interrupted the old gentleman, "read it, can't you?"

"Also, please—send—by—bearer," read Mrs. Brett tremulously, but distinctly, "'the—wages—what's—doo—to me.'"

Wages being hard cash out of Mr. Pritt's own breeches-pocket, he immediately became full of attention and energy.

"Show the man in," he said sharply. In a minute there entered a burly but sallow-faced man, on whose countenance were stamped dissipation, cunning, violence, villainy.

"Where do you come from, pray?" asked Mr. Pritt curtly.

"What's that to you?" was the surly rejoinder.

"Oh! that's it, is it?" said Mr. Pritt coolly; "then who sent you?"

"Mary Pender."

"What for?"

"Her box, and her things, and her wages—it's all down on that 'ere paper."

"Well, this good woman will let you have the box and the things; but there are no wages due."

"What d'ye mean? Eh!"

"What I say."

"Come, give me them wages; don't turn a poor gal out and cheat her too."

"When a servant breaks rules and takes herself off without notice, she forfeits her wages. That is according to Cocker, I think, Mr. Triggs?"

"Quite according to Cocker, sir," answered Triggs, smiling.

"Come! I'm not a-goin' to stand this, you know," exclaimed the ruffianly claimant, clenching his fist and making a step towards Mr. Pritt.

What he intended to do was never exactly known, for in a moment Triggs, whom he had not appeared to notice, sprang from his chair, caught the man by the collar, forced him out of the room along the passage and into the street.

"Stay where you are," said Triggs, a little out of breath, but otherwise quite calm and collected, "and the box and things shall be brought to you; move a step to get in 'ere again and I'll 'ave the p'lice down on you, and then we shall learn all about you."

The man at first looked undecided; but, having cursed and sworn a little by way of recovering himself, he was inspired to wait where he was until the box was brought to him. This he at once shouldered; and, as he strode away, he turned and shook his fist and muttered unintelligible threats at Mr. Triggs, who laughed derisively and returned to Mr. Pritt's room.

He found Mr. Pritt, whose bulk, it has already been hinted, was considerable, wheezing and coughing from excitement, but also, at intervals, laughing; for the best joke he knew was to save a few pounds.

"Thankee, Triggs, thankee," chuckled the old man, "you're

a monstrous strong feller, and it's not the first time the 'ouse has profited by your strength and pluck. I'm not what I was or I could ha' tackled that rough myself."

"Of course you could, sir," assented Triggs contemptuously; "but it wasn't your place."

"Now sit down, Triggs," resumed Mr. Pritt, 're-seating himself; "I want to have a private chat with you. Fust, take that note and put it in your pocket; you needn't read it now; it's only an invite to dinner at my house next Monday."

"You're very good, sir," said Triggs, bowing with some dignity, and, at the same time, colouring slightly, as if from unexpected pleasure or some similar feeling.

"Not at all—not at all," rejoined Mr. Pritt promptly; "you see you've dined with us sometimes of a Sunday at Nottin' 'ill, but you've never been to one o' my big spreads, such as there's a-going to be o' Monday; and when I said I should ask you my gals said there must be a reg'lar invite; ha! ha! ha! you can't do without one any more than you can do without your swaller."

Triggs put the note in his pocket, and waited for Mr. Pritt to speak again.

The old gentleman seemed to be at some loss how to begin; but, after a few reflective coughs and a deliberative use of his pocket-handkerchief, he said abruptly:

"I'm gettin' old and shaky, Triggs;" and the old man's voice grew like that of a beggar whining for relief.

"Don't say that, sir," began Triggs energetically, but he was stopped by the old man, who continued:

"I tell you I *am*; and other people notice it. When I was dining with my company the other day I over'eard the renter-warden sayin' to his friend that I didn't look like eatin' many more livery-dinners, and that man's interested in my insurance office. Besides, my doctor has been askin' nasty questions and orderin' me to be careful about my allowance of wine, as they always do when it's too late. Well, as you know, I've no children but two daughters; one of 'em's a-going to marry a captin in the army, and the other may marry a lord or a dook—she's quite fit for it; and then what's to become of the

'ouse o' business when I'm gone! A capting and a lord won't be o' much use to carry it on."

At one or two points in this address Mr. Triggs had felt an electric shock; but he replied bluntly:

"If you really feel uneasy, sir, take a partner."

The old man looked the very essence of cunning as he eyed Triggs scrutinisingly; but the face of Triggs was as impenetrable as granite.

"Perhaps I may," observed Mr. Pritt carelessly, after his keen scrutiny; "at any rate there must be a manager for to look after things in case I—I—I can't look after 'em myself, and—and—in case my children want somebody to look after 'em for *them*."

"Cert'nly, sir," said Triggs composedly.

"Meanwhile," continued Mr. Pritt, "I want you to move out o' this 'ouse."

Triggs looked extremely amazed, but replied a little gruffly:

"I am quite at your service, sir."

"It shan't be any loss to you," Mr. Pritt went on; "and I have my reasons."

Triggs bowed acquiescence.

"How soon could you be out?" asked Mr. Pritt; "by Monday next?"

"I'll be out and settled," answered Triggs decisively, "by Wednesday night."

"Then on Thursday morning at ten o'clock, Triggs," said Mr. Pritt with an air of relief, "I should like to see you here and learn what arrangement you've made. Don't do it too cheap; I shall put down your loss here at one hundred and fifty pounds a year and perhaps more; so you needn't cut it too fine."

"Thankee, sir," said Triggs, with a sober air of gratification; "but what's to be done about filling up my place here?"

"Oh! we'll not fill it up at all," replied Mr. Pritt; "Mrs. Brett and a couple o' gals will do well enough to keep the 'ouse; and you are to find a steady night-watchman, you know."

"I was thinking of Stephens, sir?" said Triggs inquiringly.

"Ah! just the man," observed Mr. Pritt, "sober, steady, honest, and strong. I'll not keep you any longer now, Triggs."

So Triggs retired to his own den and proceeded to look at what Mr. Pritt had called the "invite." It was shorter than ordinary invitations, short as they are, and couched in very different terms, for it ran thus :

"Meet me on Thursday evening in the old place at 6.30 P.M. M."

"Something wrong," muttered Triggs, as he put down the time in his note-book and then deliberately burnt the "invite" and its envelope.

Mr. Triggs, to the unfeigned delight of Mrs. Brett and her handmaidens (a substitute having been found for Mary), moved out of the house in Thames Street to a so-called villa in the suburbs; and punctually at 10 A.M. on Thursday morning reported himself and his movements to Mr. Pritt, who, after a long conversation, sent him forth radiant.

CHAPTER X.

TRIGGS HAS TO RENDER AN ACCOUNT.

At 6.30 P.M. he was punctual to a minute at "the old place," which turned out to be an ancient umbrageous tree in an unfrequented part of Kensington Gardens. But, punctual as he was, he saw already there a stately lady pacing to and fro with hurried steps. Her back was turned to him as he drew near; but she evidently caught the sound of his approaching footsteps, for she turned suddenly round and stood still, with her hands crossed in front of her, waiting for him. Her thick veil concealed her features; but her attitude was rather repellent. He advanced smiling, and with both hands outstretched; but she made no corresponding movement. She sat down upon one of two iron chairs, and invited him by a gesture to take the other. Then she threw up her veil and disclosed a handsome, swarthy face, on which displeasure was plainly written. The doughty Triggs looked sullen and rebellious as he asked sulkily:

"What's the meaning of all this, Etta?"

"You should have known sooner," she answered quickly, as the blood rushed to her face; "but I couldn't get free before this evening. Pray where did you spend Sunday?"

"Where should you think?" asked Triggs defiantly.

"I should *think*," she answered superciliously, "at that delightful place called Rosherville Gardens."

Triggs laughed, perhaps to cover a modicum of uneasiness; but he replied gaily:

"Why, you must be a witch."

"Then you did?"

"I did."

"Alone?"

"No."

"Who went with you?"

"Somebody *you* know, or ought to know."

"Somebody *I* know?"

"Ah; somebody *you* know," repeated Triggs doggedly; "you've not forgot Mrs. Maggitt, I suppose."

"Mrs. Maggitt!" exclaimed Marietta Pritt (for of course it was she), with emphatic surprise; "do you mean to say that you are still familiar with Mrs. Maggitt?"

"Odd, isn't it?" sneered Triggs; "though she never nussed *me* through small-pox, nor *my* mother through fever, when everybody else ran away for fear of infection."

"No; but she has a niece, I believe," sneered Marietta in her turn, "whom I have never seen, but whom my sister Lurline employs; pray did the niece accompany the aunt?"

"Well, she brought her niece with her," answered Triggs, a little sheepishly.

"Oh, she brought—her—niece—with her, did she?" remarked Marietta disdainfully; "and, pray, how old is the niece, and what is she like?"

"I can't tell you how old she is exactly," said Triggs sulkily; "but she's not so old as her aunt—not nigh; and as for what she's like, I ain't a drawing-master, and I can't take likenesses."

"Then I'll tell *you* what she's like," cried Marietta with concentrated passion; "she's about two-and-twenty, and as pretty as a dream; her eyes are as blue as *that*" (and she pointed to the sky), "and her complexion is like honeysuckle, and her lips are like rose-leaves, and her hair is like silk of gold, and her tears come starting at the slightest word of harshness, and she's just what men love best, the fools!"

Her words had come out like a torrent; and in her vehemence she had thrown herself forward towards Triggs, and sat glaring up into his eyes inquiringly.

"It ain't altogether a bad description," he said composedly; "but it's rather too flowery for *me*."

"You love her," she said, almost below her breath, as she tightly clutched one of his wrists with both her hands.

"Don't talk such rubbish," grumbled Triggs reproachfully.

"Swear you don't."

"I swear I don't."

"I don't think you'd deceive me, Tom," she said half-threateningly and half-coaxingly, as she moved her face still nearer to his.

"Now do be reasonable," remarked Triggs, in an injured tone, and in the spirit of calculation and candour; "would it be worth my while, d'ye suppose, even if I could love anybody but you, which I couldn't? I deceive *you*! Why, you must be mad."

She regarded him steadfastly as if to read his heart; she condoned the mercenary tone, for the sake of his evident sincerity; and gradually the tension of her face was relaxed by the softest of smiles, and her black eyes swam with unutterable love.

Triggs saw that the storm was over; he took her two unresisting hands and drew her closer to him; they signed a truce with a single glance, and exchanged the kiss of something more ardent than peace.

"Why did you take her out?" she murmured, a little petulantly.

"Those kind o' people," said Triggs sententiously, "don't think anything of yer if yer don't take 'em out of a Sunday now and then; they set more store by that than anything; they take it partic'lar friendly. And I couldn't take aunt without niece."

"Well, you mustn't take *her* out again, mind," she muttered, as she gazed almost pleadingly up at him; "promise me you won't."

"Very well, I promise," replied Triggs cordially; "and I'm sure I shan't take aunt alone," he added with a guffaw.

And so they sat and exchanged confidences. Triggs heard

how Marietta had been led to know or guess where he had been; and he thought, "Another to you, Capt'ing." And Marietta heard how her father had prevailed on Triggs to move from Thames Street, and had that very morning led him to believe that he would be promoted to the dignity of manager.

"Your father spoke most kind," he said; "he told me he meant to give me a greater rise than any I'd 'ad yet, and he wanted me to get clear away from all old 'sociations, and all the people as knew me when I was 'Jack of all trades' about the 'ouse; 'Cos," he said, 'there was nothing like distance and livin' independent-like to make people see the difference in yer position.' And I think he's right."

"I knew papa was going to take some strong measure," said Marietta joyously, "when he insisted upon having you to dinner next Monday. He told Lurline to write you an invitation; and she was impudent enough to refuse point-blank."

"Ah, she always hated me," interrupted Triggs, with a bitter smile; "she's a proud young minx; but pride often gets a fall."

"Well," continued Marietta, "papa, oddly enough, didn't burst out into a passion, he only said that she was very much mistaken about you, and that you were a very much greater man than she imagined. And then he asked me if I would write the invitation, and I, of course, said I would, but I wrote you the little note you received, for I was vexed about what I had heard from Captain Davies. However, I can't stay a moment longer; and remember, we dine at half-past seven on Monday. And now, good-bye."

Then appeared that singular phenomenon which Perkins might really have taken for a ghost, that indistinguishable mass of hat, bonnet, boots, and drapery conglomerated for a few brief moments. But Perkins had recognised the sitters, and had been overwhelmed with amazement. Had Eos and Tithonus met together, and Endymion and Selene kissed each other under his very nose, he could not have been more staggered.

CHAPTER XI.

AFTERWARD HE REPENTED AND WENT.

WHEN Perkins reached home, he must have presented a rather alarming appearance, to judge from the behaviour of Mrs. Perkins. She had begun to lecture him, as usual, upon the enormity of allowing his "tea to get cold," but when she turned round to bring the full battery of her awful presence to bear upon him, the words died away upon her lips. She clasped her hands together and muttered :

"From battle, murder, and sudd'n death, good Lord deliver us! Perkins, what trouble 'ave you bin a-gettin' into *now*?"

Perkins made no reply. He sat down upon one of the few chairs in the room, put his hat upon the table, thrust out his legs as far as they would go, plunged his hands into his pockets, and smiled feebly at his anxious wife.

His face was very pale, his hair was dank and hung down snakily upon his forehead.

A horrible idea occurred to her: Perkins, for the first time in his life, was drunk.

She was beginning to whimper, after her kind, when Perkins drew out the pocket-book and handed it to her, saying, in the soberest possible voice :

"What d'ye think o' that, my dear?"

She took it between one thumb and finger, held it at some distance from her, as if she feared that it was loaded and might go off, and screwed her nose into the contortion appropriate to the presence of fish which is far from fresh.

"What in the name of goodness gracious am I to do with this?" she asked peevishly.

"Open it," was the laconic answer.

She opened it in gingerly fashion, examined it, first of all languidly and then with an air of the deepest interest, and lastly, was quite absorbed by it. She had pulled out several pieces of flimsy paper, and then, having returned them all to their place, she shut up the book, let it fall on the coarse deal table, and looked terribly frightened.

"Ow did you come by it, Perkins?" she asked below her breath.

"Never mind 'ow I come by it," answered Perkins testily: "what d'ye think of it—eh?"

Mrs. Perkins drew her chair close up to her husband's, and there was moisture in her eyes and a curious light upon her worn features and an unwonted tenderness in the tone of her voice as she laid her hand gently on his knee and, looking affectionately in his face, said softly:

"My old man wouldn't do anythink wrong, I *know*."

"Thankee," snapped Perkins, as his furtive eyes ran round and round with amazing velocity and seemed at last about to accomplish the long-projected leap across the bridge of his nose.

"Tell me all about it," said his wife coaxingly.

After a short pause he replied:

"I found it."

"Found it!" she exclaimed eagerly.

"Ah! found it," he repeated; "it was layin' on the ground a-waitin' to be picked up, and I picked it up."

"Oh! Perkins!" cried his wife joyously; "didn't I tell you so? Jehovah-jireh."

"You're little better than a ass, I doubt," rejoined Perkins dejectedly and ungallantly.

"Losin's seekin's, findin's keepin's, I've always thought," continued Mrs. Perkins buoyantly; "and if you don't know whose it is——"

"That's all you know about it," sneered Perkins.

"Well, but Abram took the ram he found 'andy," she argued, "and there's nothin' to show it was his'n."

"I tell yer it was a different game altogether in them times; I dessay rams ran wild then; but now you mustn't take even a rabbit, they say, if it kind o' comes and asks yer," remarked Perkins authoritatively.

Mrs. Perkins was one of those good, simple, narrow-minded people who can keep commandments in the literal sense but have no idea of ramifications and refinements, and whose natural impulses are so straightforward and so promptly acted upon that they seldom have a chance of going wrong. She would no more have dreamed of theft than of murder; she would never have thought of keeping anything she picked up, valuable or not, if she knew the owner of it; if she had seen anything, of great or little price, dropped, she would have taken it and restored it to the dropper without a second thought, and would have been surprised and shocked rather than pleased at the offer of reward; but there her notions about treasure-trove ended; she was an ignorant woman, who positively was not aware of the proper course to be pursued when you stumble upon lost property; if she herself lost anything which she did not herself find again, or which was not at once picked up and given back to her, she merely considered herself by so much the worse and somebody else by so much the better, and she wept her fill accordingly. No doubt, if she had lighted upon precious stones or something that reminded her of Sindbad the Sailor and the Arabian Nights, she would have taken counsel as to what she should do of a wise woman or of a clergyman. And so she would, from sheer alarm and perplexity, if a very large amount of money had come accidentally in her way. But with respect to moderate amounts she had the feeling, as regards wealthy persons, which prevails amongst most of her class, viz. that they "would never feel the want of it," and would probably be comforted to think that "it had done somebody more good than it would have done them." And the pocket-book was evidently the property of some wealthy person, to whom twenty or thirty pounds would probably be no more than twenty or thirty pence to her. Besides, her religious views were strongly tinged with a belief in the supernatural.

She doted upon miracles; and she was particularly fascinated by stories of relief to the necessitous by miraculous agency. She was especially fond of reading how Peter discovered in the mouth of a fish sufficient money to pay taxes for two. She had, also, fed her mind with anecdotes related by modern preachers about themselves. She had gaped with sympathetic admiration over various accounts of what was evidently intended to be regarded as Divine interposition; how one reckless evangelist always plunged into debt for any buildings he wanted, and prayed to the Lord that the bill might be paid, as it always was *somehow*; how another, when at his wits' end for a ten-pound note, poured out his heart to the Lord (whether out loud before the congregation or not, did not appear), and a ten-pound note would arrive, whence he knew not, in due time; and how another (Huntingdon, she believed was his name) would, when his breeches were becoming disreputable, make that article of dress the subject of his supplications, and would find in an incredibly short space of time (such, no doubt, is the expedition of celestial tailors) a brand-new pair at his bedside. And Mrs. Perkins couldn't help thinking that these reverend gentlemen, who, by their own confession, opened their eyes and shut their mouths and took what Heaven would send them, without the slightest hesitation, would, had they been in the place and dire necessities of Perkins, have considered the affair of the pocket-book a direct intervention of Providence, and have appropriated its contents, not only without scruple, but with a chuckle of superior sanctity. For Mrs. Perkins, though she went, out of deference and love for Perkins, to the parish church on Sundays, did not find the doctrine and the discourses she heard there sufficiently seasoned with the romantic, the fanciful, the adventurous, and the extraordinary to satisfy her yearnings; and she compensated herself by attendance at Little Bethel on Wednesday evenings, and by perusing the biographies of certain popular evangelists. So now, being unable to understand why her husband should be so backward about availing himself of what the Lord had clearly delivered into his hand, she was about to return to the attack; but

Perkins, stopping her abruptly, told her, without mentioning any names, however, or saying that he knew either of the two persons he had seen together, the whole of the circumstances under which he had found the pocket-book.

Mrs. Perkins was aghast.

"Lor', Perkins," she said reproachfully, all her natural, simple honesty returning in full force, "you should ha' run after the lady at once; you see which way she went, and you might ha' caught her; and now there's no name in the book to show whose it is, nor no address neither."

"I know what I oughter do," said Perkins gloomily; "I oughter take it to the p'lice; and then, if the loser comes for'ard I b'lieve I sh'd get a quarter. That'll be over six pound; and we've saved four pound; and the rest we must raise on the furnitur' and what not."

"You'll 'ave to take the bed from under us to do it," whimpered his wife.

"The loser mayn't come for'ard at all," continued Perkins disconsolately; "there may be reasons for not wantin' to do so, and then, I s'pose, I shall get all; but, anyways, it'll be a long while afore it's settled, and I shall be county-courted fust. Besides they may ask all sorts o' questions, and it may all 'ave to come out—oh dear!"

"What if it does come out?" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins warmly, not being in her husband's secret; "you might ha' run after the lady, cert'nly, but it's frightful 'ot weather, and you couldn't make sure o' catchin' of her."

But Perkins sat and rocked himself to and fro, and was deaf to his wife's entreaty that he would at least seek inspiration and refreshment from a cup of tea. After a few minutes, however, he lifted up his face, which had been buried in his hands, and it wore an expression of satisfaction and determination. He looked almost radiant as he said cheerily:

"Come, give us a cup of tea, old woman."

She, regarding him with wonder, complied in silence.

Perkins drank his tea, swallowed a few mouthfuls of bread-and-butter, took up the pocket-book, thrust it once more into his pocket, and, nodding to his wife, said:

"Good-bye! I'm off; shan't be back till late."

"What in the name of patience are you going to do?" she asked.

"But afterward he repented and went: which of the twain did the will of his father?" said Perkins, solemnly and enigmatically; and he started off forthwith.

He took, regardless of expense in his extremity of hurry, an omnibus which carried him to the neighbourhood of Notting Hill, and, from the spot where he alighted, he ran without stopping to the house of Mr. Pritt.

"Hullo! Perkins again!" exclaimed the man-servant who opened the door: "what's up—ware'us afire?"

"Just take this to Miss Pritt," said Perkins, producing the pocket-book, "and ask her if it's her'n."

In a minute a message came to Perkins, waiting in the hall, bidding him walk into a small room and there remain until Miss Pritt came to him.

Presently Miss Pritt entered. Her swarthy features were a little flushed, and she appeared a little uneasy; but she eyed Perkins steadily and haughtily as she asked:

"Where did you find this?"

"Under a tree in Kensin'ton Gardens, miss."

"How did you know it was mine?"

"I only *thought* it was, miss."

"And what made you *think* it was."

"'Cos it was jest where you'd bin a-settin', miss."

"How did you come to be there?"

"Please, miss, I'd been sent up with a parcel to this 'ouse, and I took a walk through the gardens on my way back."

"And so you saw—hem!—you saw me drop my pocket-book?"

"Well, no, miss; I didn't see it till after you was gone."

"Why didn't you bring it at once?"

Poor Perkins lowered his eyes, twirled his hat, and shook his head reprovingly, as if he were deploring somebody's misconduct.

"Isn't it all right, miss?" he asked timidly.

"Oh yes; it's all right. I suppose you know what it contains?"

"Well, miss, I'll confess I *did* take the liberty of openin' it."

"And how much do you expect for your—your honesty?" asked Miss Pritt a little ironically.

"Not a farden, miss," answered Perkins energetically; "pray don't mention it, miss. I hadn't ought to have opened it at all, and then I shouldn't ha' known there was money in it. If I'd run after you and give it you the moment I found it, it'd ha' been no more than if you'd dropped your glove. Besides——" and he suddenly stopped.

"Besides what?" she asked.

"Why, to tell the truth, miss," answered Perkins with some difficulty, as he blushed from forehead to chin, and his eyes filled with moisture, "I didn't mean to be honest—not at first."

"You want the money very badly perhaps," she said rather superciliously.

"God knows I do," replied Perkins with a groan.

"What for? Are you in debt?"

"Yes, miss."

"To whom?"

No answer.

"To whom? Don't you hear me?"

"Please, miss, I'd rather not say," answered Perkins: for poverty and a squint are not incompatible with a noble soul.

"Some disreputable person," thought Miss Pritt. "Well, then, how much?" she asked aloud.

"Somethink over twenty pound, miss," replied Perkins in a tone of awe and despair.

"That is more than the finder of thirty pounds is generally considered entitled to," observed Miss Pritt in a cold business-like manner, "but as you've been so long in papa's service——"

"Not a farden, miss, please," interrupted Perkins; "I couldn't indeed, miss; I'm much obliged to you, but I shouldn't feel easy with any o' *that* money; it's nearly made me do what I 'ope I wouldn't do to save my life; it's accursed," he

added to himself, but, unconsciously, aloud, "like the gold of Achan."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Miss Pritt, laughing outright.

"I beg pardon, miss," pleaded Perkins in alarm; "I wasn't thinking o' you, miss; I meant myself."

"Then I am to understand that you refuse any reward at all?" asked Miss Pritt coldly.

"Yes, please, miss, thankee all the same, miss; *good-night*, miss," stammered Perkins, bowing and making for the door.

"Oh! *good-night*, Perkins," said Miss Pritt indifferently, as Perkins retired and left her meditating.

Presently she sat down and wrote a note; and the note was addressed to Triggs.

It was with a strange mixture of feelings that Perkins made the best of his way home. His heart was much lighter; but unfortunately, so was his pocket. He had done penance for the offence he had committed against his conscience, but the penance might be considered disproportionate to the offence. However, it was with a far more cheerful face and a far more easy manner than before that he now entered his poor dwelling and confronted his anxious wife.

"Well?" she exclaimed.

"I've done it," he answered sturdily.

"Done what?" asked she, to whom the expression sounded ominous.

"Why, giv'n it back o' course."

"But I thought you didn't know the owner?"

"I never said so."

"Who was she, then?"

"Miss Pritt."

Mrs. Perkins opened mouth and eyes.

"Miss—Pritt!" she ejaculated slowly.

"Ah! and you'd be more astonished still if I told yer who the gen'l'man was," replied Perkins.

"Should I though?" asked Mrs. Perkins simply, as if she thought a greater surprise would be almost impossible.

"Yes, that you would," replied Perkins; "it was—it was

—now, mind yer, I told yer you'd be surprised; it was, who should you think?"

"Lor', Perkins," burst in Mrs. Perkins, perspiring with curiosity, "don't worrit anybody so this 'ot weather: say, like a man, who it was."

"Mr.—Triggs," said Perkins solemnly.

Mrs. Perkins positively gasped for breath.

"Well! he *is* a bold un," muttered she, to whom Miss Pritt was a sort of unapproachable princess.

"Mind this is all betwixt you and me and the post," sternly observed Perkins, who had a vague idea that the scene which he had witnessed was intended to be *sub rosa*, who had no very high opinion of his wife's reticence or discretion, and who already repented that he had spoken out so freely.

"Oh! you needn't be afraid of *me*," she said, bridling, and as if she would insinuate that *he* was the more leaky vessel; and then, in the most discouraging manner, she sighed: "Poor Leila; it'll be a dreadful blow for 'er, poor thing."

"Now, look here!" cried Perkins quite fiercely, slamming his fist down on the table, "don't you let your tongue wag, that's a good soul, or you'll make some dreadful mischief."

"Be quiet, Perkins," remonstrated his wife; "you're enough to frighten one; I shan't make no mischief, you may depend. But you've not told me what Miss Pritt give you for findin' her pocket-book."

"Nothing," was the laconic reply.

"Nothing!" screamed Mrs. Perkins; "but I suppose," she added bitterly, "she takes after 'er father."

"Now, don't you be too fast," rejoined Perkins; "I wouldn't take anything."

"And why not, pray?"

"'Cos I should ha' felt as if I was bein' paid for not stealin'; besides, I couldn't bear to touch that money that very nigh made me a thief; and then again, I was bound to suffer for not doin' right at fust."

"Perkins," said his wife, emphatically, "you as good as told me this very evening that I was a ass——"

"I beg pardon, my dear——"

"Oh! don't trouble yourself. I only want to say that, if I am, then there's a pair of us. Them that won't take what Providence sends 'em, but expect Providence to study their little whims and fancies, expect a deal too much o' Providence."

And the pair proceeded to make a frugal supper.

CHAPTER XII.

A NEW WAY TO PAY OLD DEBTS.

ON the afternoon of Friday, Perkins, a little to his consternation, was summoned to the presence of Mr. Triggs. That worthy had evidently just been reading a note; and the handwriting of the note was evidently a lady's.

"Sit down, Perkins," said Triggs in almost a friendly tone.

The surprised and gratified Perkins consequently sat down upon considerably more than was his wont of one corner of a chair, and, with a grin—of one who appreciates humour—upon his face and a look of inquiry in his eyes, waited for questions.

Triggs, after taking another glance, as if to refresh his memory, at the note, said, quite gently for *him* :

"Perkins, I've sent to ask you about that money. To-morrow, you know, your time's up. Are you ready to pay?"

Perkins shook his head mournfully.

"It can't be done, Mr. Triggs," he answered with a sigh.

"The matter's out of my hands now," observed Triggs, carelessly; "I've given Mr. Tribe instructions and left it to him."

"I know you 'ave, sir," assented Perkins with a comical look of helplessness, as of one who didn't quite know what to say.

"It's a paltry sum for a man in my position," resumed Triggs petulantly, as if he were vexed with Perkins for putting him in so disagreeable a situation, "and I don't like to be

mixed up with such a business. I should have let you off and anybody else as owed me money for advance of wages, a long while ago, as soon as it got beneath me to have such things on my hands. Only I make it a rule always to have debts paid. Letting people off debts makes 'em careless. And, besides, it isn't fair on other creditors who can't afford to foller the example and who get a bad name 'cos they don't. Else you don't suppose I'd ha' gone on being bothered with a lot of trumpery little sums due to me when I was very low down on the ladder, and lent out o' kindness to poor devils that'd got into trouble and asked me to let 'em have an advance."

Mr. Triggs spoke superciliously and interrogatively rather than as if he were merely making a statement; so that Perkins shook his head negatively, though it certainly occurred to him that Mr. Triggs and other gentlemen of his kidney might avoid the annoyance of which Mr. Triggs complained, by the adoption of two simple principles of action or, rather, inaction; they might abstain both from obtrusively offering loans and also from charging interest. They might also abstain from pooh-poohing the matter and insisting upon its "standing over" to a more convenient season. For it was by such processes, as Perkins now sadly remembered, that he had originally been induced to avail himself of Mr. Triggs's "advances," and then to let things go on until the interest had "grewed" to such a size as to be too much for him.

Triggs spent a few moments in thought. He then took up a pen and wrote a few lines upon a sheet of note-paper, which he placed in an envelope. He carefully sealed up the whole and handed it to Perkins, saying:

"Here, go over to Mr. Tribe's and give him this: and wait for an answer."

Perkins took the letter gingerly, as if he were suspicious of the contents; and having shuffled out of Mr. Triggs's room, made the best of his way to Dan Tribe's den.

Mr. Tribe opened the door in person to Perkins, whom he welcomed cordially after the following fashion:

"Oh! come in, come in, thou scion of Barclay and Perkins.

I shouldn't wonder, now, if you had come to pay that little account. I know you're a pious Christian; and 'pay me that thou owest' must be a very familiar expression to you, eh, Perkins?"

Perkins walked uneasily into the room where Mr. Tribe transacted business, and without a word held out to Dan the letter.

Dan opened it, read it, flung it down upon the table, and ejaculated:

"Now, the devil fly away with me!"

"Don't, sir, don't," remonstrated Perkins gently.

"Very well, then," responded Dan cheerfully, "the devil fly away with *you*! I daresay it'll make no difference."

"Hush! sir, pray," said Perkins, deprecatingly, with uplifted hand.

"Oh; you're very religious, ain't you!" sneered Dan.

"I wish I could say so, sir," responded Perkins with quiet boldness and a deep sigh.

"Then you're ready to pay your debts, of course; 'owe no man anything,' is a favourite text of mine, if not of yours."

"I'm sorry to say I'm not, sir."

"Oh! indeed; well, I think I've read something in some high authority about handing him over to the tormentors till he have paid the uttermost farthing. We wish to have good authority for what we do, Perkins."

"You must do just as you please, sir."

"You are the sort of man to think that he that hath no money should be able to buy and eat all the same. Ha! ha! ha!" roared Mr. Tribe; "*that's your* notion of business, I suppose; but *we* don't keep that sort of shop."

Perkins sighed, but said nothing.

"Now, just sit down for a minute or two," said Dan, in a really kind tone of voice, as he forced the reluctant Perkins into a chair; "I have somewhat to say unto thee."

Perkins moved uneasily in his chair.

"I believe," continued Dan, looking grave and speaking seriously, "that you are a really pious, honest, upright, struggling man; I'll be——"

He did not finish, for Perkins put on a beseeching look, and held up his hand as if to stop Mr. Tribe's remarks.

"Well, well," resumed Dan, "I'll try not to swear; but it's a great comfort to me. I was going to say that, considering the way in which you have struggled to keep the law and the prophets, and your wife and family, when you had one, and to love your neighbour as yourself—for I've heard of your proceedings, Master Perkins, for many a long day—and all on a few shillings a-week, it's a wonder to me you've not been reduced to the workhouse a long while ago. As for getting on, I doubt whether any really good man *can* get on in this world. If you want to succeed you must do all sorts of nasty things; and 'individual enterprise,' as they call it, is only a long expression for 'number one.' It means that you must prefer the 'main chance' to everything and everybody. I began life pious. You might guess from my style of quotation and allusion that I had what they call a sound religious education, and it was nearly the ruin of me. I found my prayers and meditations and things too much for me; they were continually coming back to my mind and interrupting me just as I was about to engage in some little stroke of business whereby I might have sucked out no mean advantage. I positively used to refuse to take business that was offered me, and that would have paid me well, simply because I should have had to ruin some poor devil just to gratify somebody else's personal spite. Bless my heart, what a fool I have been! Well, I soon found it was of no use to go on like that; people grew suspicious of me, and wouldn't employ me; and so, as I hadn't the pluck to starve, or the happy knack of seeing black white when it suited my book, I made up my mind to cut religion altogether. You'll find the dilemma to which I was reduced described in some verses I once wrote. I'll give you a copy of them before you go, but at present we have something else to arrange. Do you know what is in this letter? But of course you don't; I'm a fool to ask."

Perkins shook his head ruefully.

"Well, I mustn't tell you exactly what it is," resumed Dan; "but it is something to your advantage. And it is that

extraordinary fact which led me to talk to you as I have done. For, though I remember to have read somewhere (I needn't tell *you* where): 'I once was young who now am old, yet never saw I the righteous forsaken or his seed begging their bread,' I can't help thinking that things were very different in the writer's time from what they are now. Or, stay: there is another explanation; for, of course, he couldn't have seen such a sight if 'there is none that doeth good, no not one.' I assure you I don't wish to scoff or quibble, but such things puzzle me; and if there are any righteous men nowadays, they are just the sort of people I should expect to see getting more kicks than halfpence. So far as I can judge, you are one of the righteous, and you are the only one I ever knew to have a bit of good luck just when he wanted it."

The eyes of Perkins, under the unwonted influence of hopeful expectation, performed astounding feats of obliquity, which, perhaps, prevented Mr. Dan Tribe from understanding under what particular emotion poor Perkins was labouring. At any rate, the lawyer merely wrote something on two pieces of paper, sealed up the documents in an envelope, and, giving the whole to Perkins, said carelessly:

"That's the answer, Perkins."

Perkins took it, and departed with alacrity, but not before Mr. Tribe had slipped into his hand a printed paper, saying:

"Good-day, my Christian brother; and read those lines at your leisure. And if you ever *should* think of doing anything nasty and you want advice, come to me; I'll help you with pleasure."

Perkins handed the answer to Mr. Triggs, who opened the envelope, and after an examination of the contents, held out to Perkins one of the two documents, at the same time growling:

"There, that's for *you*."

Perkins glanced at it, started and coloured with surprise, then whimpered:

"God bless you, Mr. Triggs: thankee, sir—thankee kindly."

"You've no call to 'God bless' *me*, nor thank me neither,"

rejoined Triggs coldly; "you've found a friend somewhere, and that's enough."

"Won't you tell me who my kind friend is, sir, please?" asked Perkins eagerly.

"No," answered Triggs roughly, "I won't; you can go."

Perkins turned slowly on his heel. His joy was almost changed to sadness by the want of sympathy and the refusal of his kind friend's name. He looked almost discontentedly at the document which he held in his hand, and which was a formal receipt, signed by Dan Tribe, for the troublesome "twenty pound odd." But he was recalled from his moody state of mind by a sharp summons from Mr. Triggs.

"Sir!" said the startled Perkins.

"Here! Come back a moment," said Triggs gruffly.

Perkins obeyed.

"I just wanted to say," observed Triggs, fixing his eyes sternly upon Perkins, "that there's no occasion to gossip about *everything* you see."

"Certainly *not*, sir," assented Perkins cheerfully, but suddenly his chin dropped as he remembered what he had done, and he added timidly:

"I—I—always tell my missis everything, Mr. Triggs."

"Oh! *do* yer?" thundered Triggs, who perfectly understood what this general admission implied: "then you're a bigger fool than I took even *you* for. You can go!"

And Perkins sidled out in a very limp condition, fortified only by the consciousness of having practised no concealment or deception.

"You infernal old idiot!" muttered Triggs, shaking his fist after the retreating figure of Perkins: "if you *do* trip me up, by George I'll——"

But what he would do Mr. Triggs kept to himself.

CHAPTER XIII.

DAN TRIBE'S DILEMMA.

WHEN Perkins reached home and showed his wife the liberating receipt, that good soul, as usual with her in extreme cases, whether of weal or woe, wept copiously. Afterwards she grew triumphant, and taunted Perkins with her superiority over him in point of prophetic capacity. Ultimately she confided to him that she felt as "empty as a sack," and suggested that the occasion was one upon which they would be justified in expending a small portion of the savings, which would no longer be required for payment of the debt, upon "a little bit of meat for supper."

Perkins, whose anxious soul was always heavy with anticipations of a "rainy day" to be prepared against, at first demurred, but, Mrs. Perkins having shown symptoms of relapsing into tears, consented. And it would have done good to the heart of anyone but a cynic to have seen and heard the reverence and the emphasis with which Perkins bowed his head and said, "For these and all His *other* mercies God's name be praised!" and the fervour with which Mrs. Perkins ejaculated, "Amen! amen!"

After supper Perkins related the events of the day; and pulling out the paper Dan Tribe had given him, began to con it.

"Read it out, Perkins," cried his wife plaintively.

"All right, my dear," replied Perkins with a grin; "but it seems to me to be rather 'stornary stuff; I don't understand above half on it."

"But it's verses, ain't it?" asked Mrs. Perkins, as if that were sufficient to account for any amount of the unintelligible.

"Well, it rhymes," answered Perkins dubiously, as he coughed and read:

"A DILEMMA.

Why should not man rejoice on earth
To day of death from day of birth?
Why howls he when he greets the light,
A helpless, red-skinn'd, naked wight?

'Tis conscience telling tales within
Of stolen fruit and primal sin,
And so the little infant quakes,
The heir of Adam's stomach-aches.

With shrieks and wailings manifold,
He pukes his way to three weeks old;
And then his anxious parents want
To have him sprinkled at the font.

For (if you pay the fees, at least)*
Cold water sprinkled by a priest
Is efficacious, so they say,
To charm those stomach-aches away.

The simple, mystic words are said,
The sign is made on baby's head,
And solemnly, 'mid shriek and kick,
They call him Bill, or Bob, or Dick.

So little Dick, or Bob, or Bill,
Is made a Christian (if you will),
And puts in bail, by voice of three,
To shun th' accursed, forbidden tree.

He sucks his milk, and grows apace
In years, at least, if not in grace;
Then, lest he should turn out a fool,
Poor little Christian goes to school.

He learns a Christian's duties there
At morning and at evening prayer—
Respect for pillars of the Church,
And prompt submission to the birch.

* Mr. Tribe was thinking of years ago.

At last his banner is unfurl'd,
 He marches out to fight the world,
 And finds that all he learnt at school
 Is twaddle : better be a fool.

Where Virtue lives no man can tell;
 And Truth lies hidden in a well;
 And Justice left the world below
 Ere Juvenal* was born, you know.

Then how can man rejoice on earth
 To day of death from day of birth ?
 He's like to starve, if he do well;
 If he do ill, he'll go to——"

Perkins did not utter the last word, but looking up at his wife with a horrible squint of unmitigated awe, and opening his mouth agape, he pointed with his fore-finger downwards, and said below his breath :

"Down there, you know—letter o' the alphabet next afore M."

"Lor'!" gasped Mrs. Perkins; "it's frightful, Perkins; not as I can make out what it all means; but it sounds to me dreadful wicked."

"Poor man!" sighed Perkins; "I wouldn't feel as he must feel, not if he'd give me his 'ouse full o' silver and gold."

"I should say he don't mean above 'alf on it," observed Mrs. Perkins; "I dessay he said it in his 'aste like David when he said all men were liars."

"I'm sure I 'ope he don't," rejoined Perkins; "I'd rather starve to death—at least, I think I would—than 'old such 'orrible opinions."

"'Ow can a man like that say his prayers?" asked Mrs. Perkins.

"He don't say 'em, I expect," answered Perkins, shaking his head sadly.

"Bless my 'eart!" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins; "why I could no more go to bed without sayin' my prayers than without takin' my clothes off; and, when I've said 'em, I feel as if I'd 'ung myself up somewheres out 'o the way till the mornin'—

* *Paulatim deinde ad superos Astræa recessit.*—*Sat.* vi. 19.

please God to spare me—just as I 'ang up my gownd be'ind the door."

"That's your sort," rejoined Perkins in a tone of hearty commendation; "but I'll tell yer what makes me doubt as much as anything whether Mr. Tribe means what he's set down in this here paper. Fust of all, he as good as told me hisself that he'd got soured afore he took them views. Then, again, he ain't so very well off after all; and there's nothin' to prove that, if he'd gone on perseverin' in his first intentions, he wouldn't have been better off than he is now. Besides, it's a sing'lar thing that if what a boy's taught about Truth and Virtue and Justice is all rot, even so far as gettin' on in this world is concerned, there ain't some schools where they teach the contrary; and I never 'eard of any, though there's plenty of opposition and they all profess to teach what'll pay best. It looks very much as if the world's not so bad as Mr. Tribe would make out; and that he's vexed with the world 'ccs he's vexed with hisself. You and me 'ave 'ad 'ard times, Susan; many's the time we've come very nigh to starvation; but we've 'ad a great deal to be thankful for."

"Our James, I know, 'll be a blessin' to us," said Mrs. Perkins with glistening eyes.

"Bless the lad!" rejoined Perkins; "there it is, you see. He don't write often and he don't write much, he don't git much opportunity: but he's gettin' good wages, and his heart's in the right place, as his last letter showed. Why, I should be afraid to look that boy in the face if I was to feel as Mr. Tribe feels. You ain't got only yourself to think of; we all 'ave an example to set, if it's only in a 'umble way, and there's no tellin' what 'arm you may do to a child or a neighbour by somethin' you say or do."

"And there's the little ones that's gone," whimpered Mrs. Perkins; "I'm always thinkin' of joinin' *them*; and 'ow could we 'ope for that if we was to be always plottin' and schemin', and bein' double-faced, and not tryin' to be, as we are told to be, like a little child."

"Ah!" sighed Perkins; "and yet Mr. Tribe says that's not the way to get on."

"Then don't let's try, Perkins," said his wife simply; "not that *you* ever did," she added with a frankness that would have nettled a majority of husbands.

"It's rather too late in the day, I doubt," rejoined Perkins, with a quiet smile; and, after a contemplative pause, he added: "Mr. Triggs has got on wonderful."

"And *he's* a bad 'un," blurted out Mrs. Perkins, with sudden energy.

"Hush! Susan, hush!" said Perkins sternly; "'Judge not, that ye be not judged.'"

And, after a pause, he remarked softly:

"I can't help thinkin' he done me that good turn to-day."

Mrs. Perkins said nothing; but expressed unlimited incredulity by a snort and negative tossings of her head.

"I'll tell you *what*, Perkins," she said at last, "I shouldn't wonder if you was right, after all. Not that Mr. Triggs meant to do you a good turn; there's been many ways in which he might ha' done *that*, if he'd a mind to, since you used to bring 'im 'ome wi' you to tea. But he's dropped *us* this many a year. What he wanted to do, I'll be bound, was to bribe you not to say anything about what you see in the Park. You told me 'ow angry he was when you said I always knew anything *you* knew. It's plain there's something under-'and between him and Miss Pritt, and they don't want it known."

"You ain't told anybody?" inquired Perkins anxiously.

"No, I ain't," replied Mrs. Perkins with some asperity; "though I 'ad a rare chance, for Mrs. Maggitt was 'ere this very mornin', and it was on the tip o' my tongue all the while. I really do think it was the fust time I ever kept quiet any secret I knew; but," she added tenderly, "I thought I might vex my old man, and perhaps do him an injury, and that made me careful."

"That's a good woman," said Perkins, much relieved; "there's no tellin' what trouble may be caused to innocent people by tale-bearin' and pokin' one's nose into other people's business. And if you know the business is meant to be kept

private, it's not doin' as you'd be done by to make it public. Now, let's 'ave a chapter, and go to bed."

Mrs. Perkins considered that under the circumstances it was appropriate to read the chapter about the place called Jehovah-jireh. That chapter was accordingly read and gave Mrs. Perkins great satisfaction; in so much that, having said her prayers and so "hung herself up somewheres out of the way," she slept with more than usual readiness and soundness. As for Perkins, his sleep went from him. His mind was disturbed by the reasonable suggestion of Mrs. Perkins to the effect that a bribe had been offered him by Triggs to keep silence; the sentiments of Dan Tribe's "dilemma" kept running in his head; and there appeared to him Dan Tribe himself, in the form of a tempter, recommending himself as the agent whereby the secret, for the preservation whereof it was worth while to bribe, might be worked so as to yield pecuniary profits, if only Perkins would consent to do "something nasty." But Perkins shook off the temptation and gradually fell asleep.

But, after all, Mrs. Perkins had not been quite right. If there had been a bribe at all, it had not been given by Mr. Triggs, who would not have dreamt of paying money where he could gain his point without; and he knew that Perkins would not require to be paid for simply holding his tongue. The truth was that he had received from Marietta a letter in which she had related the whole story of the loss and recovery of her purse, and she had written: "The man's name is Perkins; he owes somebody money; I wish you would find out who the creditor is and pay him out of the five five-pound notes I send herewith. Let Perkins keep the remainder; but don't let him know that it comes from me. You'll have no difficulty in managing the matter, as you pay the men's wages. He is such a funny old man with such queer ideas that he refused to take anything from *me*; but, of course, though I couldn't argue the point with him, I shall not let one of papa's servants go unrewarded for what was after all very honest conduct. I needn't tell you that he must have been a witness (though to what extent I cannot say) of

our meeting yesterday; and that it might be inconvenient just at present if he were to tattle."

Even Triggs felt some compunction at paying himself out of Marietta's money; but he saw that to do so would save anything like unpleasant inquiries and revelations. As for the remnant of the twenty-five pounds, he did not hand it over to Perkins, but reserved it to be handed over to Marietta at the first convenient season, intending to tell her that it was a mistake to overdo things; it only made such fellows as Perkins improvident. The fact was that Mr. Triggs found the course he adopted saved a deal of bother. To hand Perkins the receipt was easy enough; to have explained that there was money due to him besides would have led to more inquiry on the part of that grateful individual. Besides, Triggs now hated Perkins as Haman hated Mordecai. The more Triggs seemed to advance in honour, the more Perkins seemed to cross his path; and Triggs was more wroth to think that Perkins should have had the chance of exposing to Marietta how Trusty Thomas laid the foundation of his earliest fortunes than grateful to find that the chance had been refused. Perkins had been about the last of the paltry and discreditable debtors, and had been got rid of in that capacity only to assume another more embarrassing still.

It is probable that, had Perkins consulted Dan Tribe, considerable embarrassment might have been caused to Mr. Triggs, to the combined profit of Messrs. Perkins and Tribe; but Perkins had wrestled against temptation and prevailed, and he slept the sleep of the just.

CHAPTER XIV.

LEILA.

WHILST Perkins was sleeping the sleep of the just, having wrestled and prevailed against temptation, and determined not to take Mr. Tribe's friendly advice about doing "something nasty," Triggs had spent a restless night in thinking about what might happen if Mrs. Perkins, as he felt sure the "old fool" had, should have wagged her tongue.

"So far as Leila's concerned," he thought, "I'll have it out at once. I can't go up to the cottage afore Monday, but on Monday morning I'll go."

Monday was the day on which the glory of Mr. Triggs was to culminate; the day on which he was to sit down to meat with captains and counsellors of the earth, and with wealth and beauty; the day on which he was to be, for the first time, admitted as a guest at one of Mr. Pritt's "grand spreads." And that Monday deserved rather to be called Sunday, for the sun had come forth more like a bridegroom than ever, and, at 10 A.M., was more full of joyous strength than any young giant rejoicing to run his course. He peeped in wherever there was a chink or crevice; he peered through the interstices of jealous curtains; he gleamed through the apertures of Venetian blinds; he lightly touched the cheek or eyelid of many a lovely sluggard, woke up their slumbering forms, played softly over their snowy charms, and shot golden zigzags here and there along the water in their morning-baths. And he found out the busy, too. He danced along the rippling

Thames, he darted athwart a tiny cottage, he looked in side-long at a little bow-window; but in the room to which that window belonged he found no lovely sluggard. Lovely she was, but busy as a bee.

The cottage was poor but pretty; it stood on the river-bank about six miles from London; it was thatched, gable-ended, two-storied, whitey-brown; honeysuckle and other creepers ran riot over the walls and the porch; there was garden here, there, and everywhere, save at the spot where a diminutive lawn stretched down to the water's edge. The small bow-window looked out upon lawn and river, and at the bow-window sat Leila, working. Everything, including Leila, was on a somewhat small, slight, fragile scale; but everything, including Leila, was fresh and neat and pretty. Leila had been up since five o'clock; for nearly five hours her little hands had been ceaselessly moving with a stitch, stitch, and a snip, snip, yet she showed no signs of fatigue, and she seemed as cool as a rosebud just washed in a shower. The glorious weather suited her exactly. In such weather she both felt and looked her best; in such weather her complexion gained in delicacy without losing in brilliancy, her soft blue eyes appeared full of merry motes that came and went and changed their colour, and a golden gleam flashed in and out amongst the wavy masses of her hair.

"Oh, what lovely weather!" she cried, as she gazed wistfully at a water-wagtail bobbing on a punt, and looking mighty pleased at his reflection in the shimmering river.

"For them that like it," rejoined a snappish voice from the adjoining room, where Mrs. Maggitt was employed on household duties.

"There's a beautiful soft breeze, auntie," said Leila pleadingly.

"Oh, is there?" snarled Mrs. Maggitt; "then it's far too beautiful to come a-nigh an ugly old woman like me, or it's so soft I can't feel it."

"Why, it's just like a fan—without the trouble of using it," murmured Leila, as she closed her eyes for a moment in exquisite enjoyment.

"Fans!" snapped Mrs. Maggitt; "people with their hands full o' work must do without fans."

"The more reason to thank the breeze for fanning you, auntie," laughed Leila, as she energetically resumed her stitching and snipping.

"Thankee for nothing!" growled Mrs. Maggitt.

"You don't like summer, auntie?"

"I don't like being made into dripping, if that's what you mean; I'm sure I've no fat to spare."

"Don't you like the sun, auntie?"

"Well, I've nothing particular to say against the sun; it gives a very good light, and it saves candles as long as it goes on shinin', which is a consideration for us *por* people."

"And it keeps you warm without coals, auntie."

"It keeps *me* a deal *too* warm; and it breeds insects and fevers, and it makes all sorts o' bad smells."

"There are more pretty, winsome insects to give you pleasure than there are ugly, tiresome ones to give you trouble, auntie; and as for the fevers and the bad smells, are not people themselves to blame for not being clean and careful?"

"They may be and they may not be; all I know is, the more sun the more stink—there."

"Oh! the sun seems to put life and strength and spirits into *me*, auntie!" cried Leila enthusiastically.

"And it seems to draw all the inside out o' *me* through the pores o' my skin," sneered Mrs. Maggitt; "and it makes me feel as weak as a rat and so queer I can hardly touch a bit o' victuals."

"Poor auntie!" murmured Leila sympathetically; "but," she added playfully, "isn't *that* also a consideration for us *poor* people?"

"Don't you talk nonsense, Leila!" replied Mrs. Maggitt angrily; "when you come to my time o' life you'll know the blessin' of a good appetite—leastways if you've got anything to put into it," she added, regardless of strict rules of language.

Leila discreetly tacked, and got back into her former channel.

"Then if you had lived ages ago, auntie," she said, "you wouldn't have been one of those people who used to worship the sun?"

"Worship the *sun*!" exclaimed Mrs. Maggitt in horror; "I hope, my dear, I should never have been such a wicked pagin!"

"I'm sure *I* should," rejoined Leila pensively; "the sun would have seemed to me the giver of all good gifts; oh! the sun-worshippers for me!"

"My *dear*!" remonstrated Mrs. Maggitt; "why the Bible* says you mustn't so much as kiss your hand to a heavenly body."

"It's the sun," continued Leila gaily, "that makes the flowers so bright and splendid and the fruit so juicy and sweet. It's the sun that quickens and ripens everything—man and bird and beast and crops; and man, of course, includes woman. It's the sun that makes the valleys stand so thick with corn that people laugh and sing. It's the sun that makes the salmon leap and the little fishes jump for joy. Hark! auntie: 'Cuckoo! cuckoo!' well, it's the sun that makes him call like that and tell us how cosy he feels. So *I* say, darling, 'Cuckoo! cuckoo!'" and she imitated the note of the bird.

"Lor', Leila!" ejaculated Mrs. Maggitt in a forbidding tone.

"And what is it, auntie," continued Leila defiantly, "that makes your tea so refreshing, and your coffee so fragrant? Why the sun. We don't get much wine, certainly; but it does you good, you know, auntie, when we do get a little. You like to see it sparkle, and you say it makes your heart feel warmer and lighter, and your poor dear back feel stronger. Well, it's the sun that makes the sparkle and the warmth and the lightness and the strength. The sun that ripened and sweetened the grape lives in the juice, and is like a soul to the wine."

* JOB, ch. xxxi. v. 26, 27.

"*Upon my word!*" exclaimed Mrs. Maggitt agape.

"And I could fancy," added Leila with a sigh, "that, when you die, it is because you have used up all the sun you had absorbed and something prevents you from absorbing any more."

"You've been reading some o' them disgraceful yaller-covered books, my dear," said Mrs. Maggitt severely.

"Disgraceful, aunt!" cried Leila, with a slight blush.

"I call 'em disgraceful," replied Mrs. Maggitt: "not that there's any bad *words* in 'em, so far as *I* know, for I haven't read much; but the ideas they put into people's heads, especially about marriage, seem to me to be about as shockin' as well can be. I *do* declare," she continued vehemently, snatching up a certain yellow-covered volume, "I read a few pages in this 'un, and, if it hadn't ha' bin summer and no fire in the grate, I'd ha' took and put it right into the flames—though it *does* belong to Mr. Triggs. What he lends you such trash for, I can't think."

"Trash! auntie; why, I thought them so clever."

"Well, my dear, you ought to be a better judge about that than I am, since you was edgercated to be a nurs'ry gov'ness and went to a fust-rate school, but I *do* know what's proper for a young woman to read, and *they ain't*."

"You know, aunt, there's great liberty of thought and speech nowadays; and if you don't read what is written, how are you to be on your guard against new opinions? They might take you unprepared and gain an advantage over you suddenly."

"Lord bless the gal!" exclaimed Mrs. Maggitt testily; "she'll be putting on a pair o' breeches and going out doctoring next. As for freedom of thought and speech, these sort o' people," she said, spanking the yellow-covered volume, "should think and speak and write as much as they liked, if *I* had *my* way, but their thinking and speaking should be done on the treadmill, and their writing should be done in a cell of Newgate prison, and should be burnt by the common hangman as soon as ever they'd finished."

"That would be a queer sort of liberty," replied Leila,

laughing: "but I quite agree with you about the doctrines in that book: they're detestable. I think I shall ask Tom not to lend me any more of that sort."

"I *would*, my dear," said Mrs. Maggitt emphatically; "I'm sure Mr. Triggs can't have read it himself; he has no time for much reading, I daresay."

There was a silence of some minutes, and then Leila said despondingly:

"Tom never comes *here* now, auntie."

"Oh! Mr. Triggs is very busy making his fortune, my dear," sneered Mrs. Maggitt.

Leila made no remark.

"Mr. Triggs is getting to be quite a cut above us, you know, and quite a rich man, my dear," sneered Mrs. Maggitt again.

Again Leila made no remark.

"Rich and por are ile and vinegar, my dear," sneered Mrs. Maggitt for the third time.

And for the third time Leila made no remark.

Mrs. Maggitt glanced towards her, and softened immediately; for Leila's head hung drooping over her work, and two tears were trickling down her cheeks.

Mrs. Maggitt was at her side in a moment.

"Never mind what a cross old woman says, dearie," she whispered; "I didn't mean anything, only the weather makes me peevish. Depend upon it he's trew as steel; he's a bear, that's cert'n, and I must say so; but he's trew as steel, I *do* believe."

"In the g—good—old—t—times," whimpered Leila; "he used to come on a day like this to tea in the evening and take us on the river."

"Hush! darling, there's somebody coming," said Mrs. Maggitt, whose ear caught the sound of a creaking gate.

Heavy footsteps crunched the gravel; Leila inclined her pretty head for an instant, listening, and then started to her feet.

"Why, here he comes!" she almost shouted; "I never knew him so early before;" and she threw down her work

and rushed to the porch, fairly clapping her hands with pleasure as Triggs strode up to the door. "Oh! Tom," she cried, "*I am so glad.*"

And so soon as Triggs was within reach, she raised herself a-tiptoe, rested her hands upon his shoulders, and with innocent frankness laid her chin upon his tawny beard.

Mr. Triggs took freely what was freely proffered and was much comforted; for he thought, "It's evidently all right at present; Mother Perkins hasn't sprung a leak as yet." And he was the more confirmed in this opinion by the greeting he received, as he entered the house, from Mrs. Maggitt.

"Good-morning, Mr. Triggs, *very* pleased to see you," she exclaimed, all smiles.

"Mornin', mum, mornin'," replied Triggs, shaking hands; "I needn't ask if *you* can manage to keep yourself warm; ha! ha!"

This plain allusion to her heated appearance offended Mrs. Maggitt's sensitive spirit; and she took an early opportunity of retiring to the solitude of the back premises.

So that Triggs and Leila were alone.

She had resumed her work, and sat smiling and stitching and conversing with Triggs, who had thrown himself into a rocking-chair opposite to her.

"What are you doing with that lace and stuff, Leila?" he asked; "pocket-andkerchers?"

"No," she answered with a slight blush; "it's some work I have to do for Miss Lurline—part of her wedding-clothes."

"Oh! that's it," growled Triggs, to whom the answer appeared to have caused an unpleasant shock; for he rocked restlessly in his chair and said nothing more for a minute or two. His eye fell upon the yellow-covered book hereinbefore alluded to. He took it up and began to turn over the leaves vacantly.

Twice and thrice Leila was on the point of speaking; her colour rose, her breast heaved, her lips moved, but no words came. At last, with a great effort, she said timidly:

"I wish you wouldn't send me any more books like that, Tom."

"Why? What's the matter with the book?" asked Triggs in a surly tone.

"Have you read it?" was Leila's quiet counter-question.

"Me!" he exclaimed with a scornful laugh: "I've no time for reading."

"I thought you hadn't," rejoined Leila with an air of relief; "now just read those few pages where the marker is."

Triggs turned to the place and asked a little petulantly:

"Where am I to begin, then?"

"Where it says, 'There are two kinds of marriage,'" replied Leila with her eyes fixed steadfastly upon her work.

Triggs threw one leg discontentedly over the other, leaned back in his chair, and read to himself a mischievous effusion, in which the doctrines of polygamy or quasi-polygamy, "affinity," and similar rubbish were supported, in such wise as to catch the fancy of the weak-minded, partly with audacious argument, partly with specious insinuation, partly with sheer rodomontade.

"There are two kinds of marriage," it began; "one with and one without your outward and visible forms and mummeries; one contracted with the aid of law or religion, or both, and with the approbation of what is called society, and one contracted without any intervention of money-grubbing lawyers or intrusive priests or conventional pedants, but with the consent of the only two persons properly concerned, with the sanction of Heaven (for Heaven is Love) and with approbation of all expansive and sympathetic souls. Of the two, the latter is generally the more genuine and the more holy: for we live in such an artificial state of society that the former is generally a matter of mere worldly and pecuniary consideration, without the leaven of pure and heavenly affection," etc. etc.

It then went on to speak of "the morganatic marriage, an institution which has not made the practisers of it to stink in the nostrils of the most Christian sovereigns and of the most devout prelates." It thence deduced an argument in favour of bigamy, or even polygamy, which "our law makes a crime."

It continued: "Say that you have married, as the law

counts marriage, for any of the thousand and one reasons for which kings and princes and nobles, and persons with a position and a fortune to make or keep up, do constantly marry, unless they choose rather to encounter certain downfall and hopeless poverty; well, the chances are that you are still, in all but name, unmarried :

ἡ γλῶσσ' ὁμώμοχ' ἡ δὲ φρὴν ἀνώμοτος.

"She who should be made your wife at the altar where ~~Lo~~ is high-priest is lost to you for ever, because to marry her would be bigamy."

It then insinuated that there is a virtual bigamy; that a man may take to himself a second wife, though the dear name be given her only by him and herself and the initiated. Then he has not infringed the law, and at the same time has contracted a new tie "hallowed by the grace of Heaven, by the sanction of immemorial antiquity, by the ideas and customs prevalent amongst a portion of highly civilised Christendom. And the second, the unconventional wife, will be, from the very nature of the mystic union, far dearer and more precious than the first—the conventional," etc. etc. And it concluded by asking: "Do not sympathetic souls yearn rather towards Fair Rosamond than towards Queen Eleanor?" and by eulogising "every tender, trusting, guileless woman who, regardless of mere names and titles, is content to lead a virtuous existence as a Heaven-bestowed and unconventional wife."

"Well," said Triggs, shutting the book, and throwing it down on the table, "I've read to the end of the chapter; I s'pose that's enough."

Leila, who had cast furtive glances at him, from time to time, as he read, and had marked with changing colour every frown and smile, and scowl and nod with which he accompanied his reading, replied :

"And what do you think of it, Tom?"

"It's a cut above *me*," answered Triggs indifferently, "every here and there; and it's a bit too flowery and sentimental sometimes, but there's some devilish good sense in it too."

"Tom!!!" exclaimed Leila, in a tone of surprise and alarm.

"*Devilish* good sense, I say," repeated Triggs defiantly, but shuffling a little with his feet.

"My dear Tom!" again exclaimed Leila: "why I think it's most abominably shocking."

"Now, look here," said Triggs, sitting bolt upright in his chair, "I am a-going to ask you a few questions."

"Go on, dear Tom."

"Do you love me?"

Leila laid down her work, got up from her chair, sat down upon Triggs' knee, put her left arm round his neck, buried her right hand in his beard, looked laughingly into his eyes, and then gave him a long, and some people would think very satisfactory—answer.

"I take that to mean 'Yes,'" said Triggs with a sort of grim and stolid humour; "then what would you do for me?"

"Anything."

"Anything?"

"Anything that's not wrong, I mean."

"Oh! Anything that's not *wrong*," sneered Triggs; "and suppose I don't want you to do what's *wrong*?"

"I never imagined you did," replied Leila, with honest confidence.

But confidence is sometimes disconcerting, and even Triggs, the man of iron, seemed to be a little disconcerted.

"You know I've set my heart on two things," he said doggedly.

"Haven't you gained *either* of them yet?" she asked with a little pout.

"No; but I'm bound to win the double event," he answered, dropping his arm from Leila's waist, and looking with a stern, determined, preoccupied air out of the window.

Leila thereupon rose quietly from his knee, resumed her chair, and fell to again upon her stitching, saying:

"I must get on with my work."

"Are you tired of waiting, Leila?" asked Triggs abruptly.

"Waiting!" she exclaimed, as the blood rushed to her face; "waiting, what for?"

"To be my wife," answered Triggs bluntly.

"Are you tired, Tom?" she asked faintly and with down-cast eyes.

"I don't feel inclined to wait much longer," he answered discontentedly.

Leila breathed quickly but said nothing.

"Do you think I'm well enough off to marry?" he asked gruffly.

"You are the best judge," replied Leila softly; "you certainly seem to be getting on famously."

For a few moments there was no sound but of Leila's needle. Then Triggs said:

"If we were to be married *now*, Leila, it would be *u p* with the double event."

Leila's bosom heaved expectantly; but she did not utter a word.

"Would you help me to win, Leila?" he asked earnestly.

Her tearful blue eyes were like harebells washed with rain as she replied tremulously and passionately:

"How *can* I, if you tell me nothing of your plans? Only show me how I can!"

He hesitated for a while, and then he said in a tone of indifference:

"You don't see a many people here, Leila?"

"Scarcely ever a soul," she replied, with a peculiar smile, "except auntie."

"Are you dull?"

"N—n—no, not particularly; I've too much to do to be dull."

"And you wouldn't be even so dull as you are if you had a husband to come and stay with you sometimes?"

She looked puzzled, and even frightened, as she stared with wide-open eyes at Triggs and murmured:

"A husband! to come and stay with me sometimes. I don't understand."

Triggs now assumed an air of dogged resolution, and fixing his eyes stedfastly on the yellow-covered book which lay upon the table, delivered himself by jerks of what was uppermost in his mind. He did not even glance towards Leila, and,

therefore, he could not see what effect his words were having upon her, as he jerked out his sentences.

"Look here, Leila," he said; "I'm a plain man and hate beating about the bush. I came here this morning to speak out, and I'll do it. You say you love me; and I'd marry you in the reg'lar way to-morrow if I could. But I can't. But you ain't obliged to do everything in the reg'lar way, unless you care what people think. And living as you do here, you ain't likely to care much about what people think. I'm glad you showed me that book, 'cos it'll help me to speak my mind. You'd always be my wife, so far as love and all that; I'd settle a good tidy sum——"

A low cry interrupted him; he looked up and glared at Leila. Her work had dropped from her hands upon the floor; she was leaning back in her chair, pale, gasping, pressing one little hand to her heart.

"Oh, Tom!" she moaned, "after all these years!"

He moved towards her, but she shuddered and waved him off.

"Go away," she murmured, "you've broken my heart;" and with a long-drawn sigh she swooned away.

"Thunder and lightning!" muttered Triggs; then raising his voice he shouted: "Hi! Mrs. Maggitt—Mrs. Maggitt—Mrs. Maggitt—come to Leila!" and at the appearance of the faithful aunt he hurried away with a wave of the hand and an angry order:

"Go to her, can't yer? She's a-faint, I tell yer; hot weather or something—I don't know what's come to her."

In a moment Mrs. Maggitt was at Leila's side; but for some minutes Leila was beyond the hearing of any words or the feeling of any caress. She only lay and moaned and murmured:

"Oh, my heart is broken—my heart is broken! So many years—so many years!"

For fully a quarter of an hour Mrs. Maggitt sat beside her niece in silence; or, rather, she sat and muttered unintelligible sounds in a low voice, as she chafed the cold hands, and stroked the soft, down-fallen hair, and kissed the pale, chill face before her.

After a while she asked:

"What is it, my dearie?"

But Leila only shuddered.

"Please draw down the blind," she said presently.

Down went the blind and dimmed the light of the glorious sun. It seemed to Leila better so; for the sun had gone out of her young life, and the beams she had loved were hateful to her. She must shut out the golden gleam; shut out the glistening grass; shut out the smiling flowers; shut out the merry river, and the happy little wagtail bobbing on the punt. But sounds she could not shut out; and "Cuckoo! cuckoo!" still cried the distant bird. And somehow the note seemed to have a different meaning; it no longer seemed to tell of comfort—it seemed rather to tell of desolation. And Leila pondered over what she had heard of the cuckoo's history; a cruel bird that deserts its own nest and leaves its own young to be hatched as best they may.

Before long poor Leila was sufficiently recovered to relate her pitiful story to her astounded aunt. And her aunt was so completely stricken aghast that she could only ejaculate:

"And me to have thought him as trew as steel!" And "Oh! the villin!" she added, as if she did mean it, and "God forgive him!" as if she didn't.

"We can't stay here, auntie," said Leila mournfully but decisively.

"Cert'nly not, my dearie," assented Mrs. Maggitt vehemently; "as soon as ever you're fit to be left, I'll go and have a think about what's to be done."

"You can leave me now, auntie," said Leila gently: "I should like to be alone for a little while. If I were a lady I think I would go to bed; but we poor girls must get on with our work, however bad we feel. And, perhaps, it will do me good to work," she added with a plaintive smile.

Mrs. Maggitt made no verbal reply, but kissed her niece and went whimpering out of the room. And Leila took up the fancy-work on which she had been engaged; and, with heart-ache and head ache and brimming-eyes, sat bravely stitching and stitching. And from time to time the trickling tears fell down on Lurline's wedding-garment.

CHAPTER XV.

MR. FRITT'S GRAND SPREAD.

IN the case of an ordinary person the way in which Mr. Triggs had begun the day would have been a very bad preparation for the entertainment with which he was to end it; but Mr. Triggs was not an ordinary person. If he was not "trew as steel," he was as strong as steel; and was not liable to suffer much from nervous agitation. After leaving the little cottage, where Leila lay swooning, he made his way, first of all, to Dan Tribe's, where he did a little business which caused him to come out into the street with a more than usually determined expression about his mouth, and a flash of anything but holy satisfaction playing about his eyes, muttering to himself: "Better to forestall 'em at once." He then went to his place of business, and so deported himself that a young clerk, of a poetical turn, confided his view of the establishment in which his affectionate relatives had obtained for him "an excellent situation" to a fellow-clerk in the following short but forcible parody:

" Oh ! if there be a Hades on earth,
It is this—it is this ! "

However, when the hour came for Mr. Triggs to start for Notting Hill he was in the highest possible spirits. He was not amongst the earliest arrivals, and when he entered the drawing-room his appearance created some interest. He was not rudely stared at, but an eyeglass was here and there stuck for a moment into an inquisitive eye, and shot out again by

that skilful management of the facial muscles which can be attained by only those who have devoted a considerable portion of their valuable time to a suitable course of practice, or who have probably studied under a professor. Bright eyes, too, unfortified, or rather unextenuated, by any sort of glasses, stole furtive glances in his direction, and the smile of amusement which was seen just forming upon the pretty lips appeared to die suddenly away under the influence of a different feeling, somewhat akin to admiration; for Triggs, as he strode, a little too heavily perhaps, from the door to the spot where Miss Pritt stood expectant, looked the embodiment of conscious strength.

Miss Pritt, in spite of all her efforts to assume indifference, received him with the flush upon the cheek and the sparkle of the eye, and the display of dazzling teeth, and the warm pressure of the hand, that betokened unfeigned pleasure; and her sister observed it, and gave her a look so full of malicious intelligence that Marietta recovered herself instantly, and engaged in commonplace conversation with her neighbours.

Lurline, without rising from the seat where she was half reclining, gave Triggs her ordinary supercilious reception. She laid two gloved fingers upon his outstretched palm, bent her head slightly, and smiled scornfully at Triggs' wonted bluff salutation: "And how are *you*, miss?"

Old Pritt gave him a hearty greeting, and was soon talking "shop" with him in a low and confidential tone.

Captain Davies, who had been at Lurline's side, had started slightly at sight of Triggs, but the latter had of course been prepared for the encounter, and had simply bestowed upon the gallant Captain one cool and almost insolent glance, which the gallant officer had met with well-bred but haughty self-possession, and had then exchanged with Lurline an elevation of the eyebrows.

In a few minutes dinner was announced, and Triggs found himself escorting down the ample staircase an "old gal in green," as he would in his own language have described her. She, however, prided herself upon being the wife or "lady" (as for some inscrutable reason she preferred to have herself

described in print and spoken of by the parishioners) of the excellent Christian minister who has already been mentioned as so judiciously adapting his doctrines to the consciences of the "comfortable classes," and who on the present occasion was understood to say grace, a ceremony which he performed by shutting his eyes, resting his chin upon his neckcloth, and muttering something short and, no doubt, sweet, of which, however, only "Amen" was audible.

Old Pritt was in his glory. He looked venerable and rubicund and ample enough to have been an aged nobleman; he was almost as gentlemanlike as his own butler, and, if he would but have condescended to show more regard for the Queen's English, he would really have done honour to the magnificent banquet at which he presided. On one side of him he had Lady Needles, wife of a knight who was also an eminent judge (of wines and cookery especially), and on the other the lovely Miss Farquharson, whose younger sister, Caroline, was lower down on the opposite side, next to Triggs, and whose widowed mother, proud of her daughters' good birth, good breeding, good education, and above all, good looks, but painfully conscious of their precarious future, seeing that they were respectively within one and three years of thirty, and that with her own annuity (and she was a helpless and hopeless invalid) would disappear the very brougham in which they were driven to dinner-parties, evening-parties, and elsewhere, had carefully impressed upon them the desirability and even necessity of never refusing an invitation to any house where, to use her own expressive rather than ladylike phrase, "there was likely to be money about."

Wherever old Pritt's eye, which, though fishy, was serviceable, rested for a second, it settled upon somebody connected in some way with the independent gentry (as in the case of the Farquharsons), with the military, with the naval, with the legal, with the clerical, with the medical, and with other professions.

Triggs alone among the guests represented commerce; and, in old Pritt's opinion, commerce, as represented, could hold its own against any of the professions. He was delighted

to think that he had insisted upon having Triggs invited; it would be a good preparation for what was to come.

As for Triggs, though he certainly felt out of his element, and was, accordingly, a little awkward, he was not at all shy. He was conscious that his hands, especially in the vicinity of the nails, differed considerably in appearance from those of the other guests; but they were very like Mr. Pritt's, and Mr. Pritt was the sort of man that got on in the world. He had compared his own clothes with those of the other guests, and could see with half an eye that there was a considerable difference, chiefly in point of cut, and that his boots were thicker and coarser and less polished than theirs, but he smiled disdainfully as he thought to himself that they were a pack of stuck-up dandies, and that his own diamond ring and his plain but heavy gold watch-chain were, carat for carat, worth more than anything they could show. He had made many attempts at conversation, but, when he remarked to the Christian minister's "lady" that he supposed (which was a favourite supposition of his) that she "could manage to keep herself warm," his affability had met with so freezing a reception that Triggs felt half-inclined to admit that in her case he had no doubt made a mistake, and that the reverend gentleman, her husband, could never be in want of a refrigerator or refrigeratrix. Nor had he at first succeeded much better with the fair Caroline Farquharson, who sat on his other side.

"I dessay you don't care to know that coffees are very quiet, miss?" he had said interrogatively.

"I'm afraid I don't understand you, sir," she had answered with a rigid face and a stony stare.

"No; I should say sugars were more in your line," Triggs had rejoined with a cool glance of admiration which brought a tinge of colour to her pale face.

"Sir!" she had exclaimed haughtily.

"Sugars are sweet, you know," Triggs had said confidentially, and, as she made no remark, he had added gruffly:

"Well, sugars are quiet, too."

Triggs did not intend to make a joke; it was not at all in

his way ; but Caroline Farquharson had thought that he did, and had given him a long, sharp, searching look which caused a sudden change in her behaviour. That look had revealed to her, romantic as she was by nature and by the course of reading she pursued, a fact of which she had hitherto been totally unconscious. Triggs had been rather angered than merely disconcerted by her manner of treating him, and had turned his face completely round towards her just as she gave him that searching look ; and, as she swiftly withdrew her gaze and appeared to be absorbed in the contents of her plate, she felt the influence of a powerful impression. That face, upon which she had just gazed, with the frown upon the forehead, the half-haughty and half-threatening gleam in either eye, the determined set of the mouth, and the tawny, wavy beard and moustachios, put her in mind of Cœur de Lion ; and the massive frame on which the head was set, and the muscular hand which rested on the table close by her, did not detract from the fancied resemblance. The king might have had a more refined appearance (and of that she did not feel at all certain), but he could not have presented a more splendid example of bodily man. She looked round the room, and to her own heart she admitted that her neighbour, whoever and whatever he might be, was the goodliest man of all. The weaker sex was like wax before the stronger ; and she softened towards him wonderfully.

"You should never trust appearances," she replied, laughing quite as much with pleasure at being addressed as with amusement at his peculiar language, when he said :

"Gals have the pull of men this weather ; they look so cool and comfortable in them white, thin things ; and us all smothered in black."

And when he, having by no means astonished a servant (who knew him and his ways) by asking for bitter beer, turned to her and said apologetically :

"Champagne is all very well for you ladies, but I find a drop of bitter beer does me as much good as anything," she replied graciously :

"Then I think you are right to take it."

As her gaze wandered from guest to guest, it lighted for a moment upon Captain Davies; and she could not help contrasting his more refined looks and more easy manners, his light but compact and active figure, the latent fire that lurked in the quiet depths of his eyes, and, when he closed his mouth, the serene self-assertion and tenacity displayed in his slightly jutting and smoothly-shaven chin, with the rough-and-ready, stalwart, defiant man who, bearded like a pard, sat close beside her. Nor did the gallant Captain come off altogether superior in the mental comparison she instituted; he was certainly very well, was admirably adapted for these modern times, and had, no doubt, looked beautiful when he charged with the "six hundred" at Balaklava; but her burly neighbour would have shone in the days when victory was the prize of bodily force, when his good lance or his tremendous battle-axe would have cleared a space before him as quickly as the reaper makes a clearing amongst the standing corn, and when a blow from his mailed right hand would have been as fatal as a buffet from the lion-hearted king. He ought, at any rate, to have been a soldier of some kind, and spent his valuable time between killing men and making lion-like love to women. Her train of thought led her to say to her neighbour, a little timidly:

"Were you ever in the army?"

"Never, thank God!" said Triggs heartily.

"You don't admire the army evidently," rejoined she, laughing.

"Can't say I do, miss," assented he, with an involuntary glare in the direction of Captain Davies; "why should I?"

"Oh, they're so brave, you know," she simpered.

"Oh, are they?" he said dryly. "It seems to me that they're not half so brave in general as men of business."

"That is downright heresy!" she exclaimed so vehemently as to bring up to the rescue a young curate, to whose inquiring glance and eager, up-pricked ears she paid sufficient attention to say:

"You needn't be alarmed, sir, it is nothing against the Church; it is against the army."

"Then that concerns you, Davies," said the young curate, smiling across the table to the gallant Captain.

"What concerns me?" asked Captain Davies tranquilly.

"You must know, Captain Davies," answered Caroline Farquharson, raising her voice, "that this gentleman to my left says that you soldiers are not half so brave in general as men of business, and I say that it is downright heresy."

"I daresay the gentleman is right," replied the gallant Captain imperturbably, adding, with the faintest possible tone of irony, "from his point of view."

"What I mean," said Triggs doggedly, "is this. Of course I'm speakin' of a strugglin' man of business that has to fight the battle of life, which is a harder battle than Waterloo. Well, if a man means to fight it and win it, in business, what does he have to do? He don't wear a smart uniform to keep up his spirits; he don't ride a fine horse to help him forward to where he'd rather not go of himself; he isn't drilled to that degree that what he does he does half-unconscious, like 'foller-my-leader;' he don't have any o' that fellow-feelin'—*spreed-de-core* I believe they call it—that makes chaps stick together like leeches, and back one another up when they're a bit shaky. Why, his feller-business-man 'd be more like to suck his blood, leech-fashion, or swaller 'im down, as I'm told lobsters 'll swaller a poor brother-lobster that's shed his shell and 's waitin' for a new 'un—I don't mean anything personal to soldiers, Captin'g," he said, in a rough tone of apology, across the table to Captain Davies, "by speakin' of lobsters."

"Oh! pray don't apologise," replied the gallant Captain, smiling a little contemptuously; "we shouldn't mind if you did; pray go on."

"Well, then, as I was sayin'," resumed Triggs, "the business-man, in his struggle up, mind you, gets none o' those pats on the back that soldiers get, and that'd put heart into a cur; he don't get reg'lar pay and everything found him, and, if he's an officer, an allowance from his friends; he don't get lots o' spare time to go swellin' about in his uniform or his fine clothes; he isn't expected to be a little wild, and liked all

the better for it; and he don't have all the pretty gals settin' their caps at 'im."

Here he paused slightly, and glanced across the table malignantly at Captain Davies; but that gallant officer was looking, with a smile on his lips, at his neighbour, Lurline, who, without deigning to even cast a glance at Triggs, said, in a loud voice and supercilious tone:

"None but the brave deserve the fair."

"Brave!" sneered Triggs; "soldiers seem to me to have to be bribed to show such bravery as *they* show. To say nothing of the pay and dress and what I said just now, there are medals and clasps and what not; and at last there was the invention of the Victoria Cross to get 'em up to the scratch."

Captain Davies, who was himself a V.C., flushed slightly at this remark. He, however, contented himself with saying politely:

"It may be as you say, sir; but you have not as yet shown us how the business-man displays his superior bravery."

"Then, look here," answered Triggs gruffly: "the business-man stands all alone by hisself; I'm talkin', recollect, of the strugglin' man that means to succeed. Well, that man's hand is against every man, and every man's hand is against him; that man can look nowhere but to hisself for any encouragement; that man gets his bare pay for workin' hard, and anything extry must come of his savin' that man can't save unless he is constantly fightin' and conquerin' hisself—a tougher enemy than Old Bony or the Roossians; that man has had for years, p'r'aps, to pinch hisself as a besieged garrison does for only a few weeks; that man, when he has invested his savin's in no matter what spec, has to show a bold front to all sorts of enemies in all directions—storms and tempests at sea when his spec is anything in the ship-line, and scoundrels and fools and bankrup's on land! that man has to be cool when his head might give way under temptation or despair, or slights and affronts—and, let me tell you, it requires far more pluck to bear such things without losing your nerve, than to put a bullet through your head in a moment of devil-may-care temper, or to knock another man's teeth down

his throat, and please yourself but ruin yourself as well ; that man has to take facer after facer, day after day, in the way o' disappointment or downright loss, or what not, and yet come up smilin' to time ; that man has to be wide awake all day and yet sleep at night with one eye open ; it's the *continual* strain, the wear and tear, Captin', as if you were on duty in the trenches *always*, and no furlough, no cessation of war, no decorations, nor anything to keep up your spirits, except your determination to succeed and the bits of success you get after long tussles : in fact, I should say that the difference between the soldier's pluck and the business-man's is much the same as between what's required for an occasional fair stand-up fight—when you can't very well help it, either, without comin' to grief, besides bein' called a coward even by your friends—with man, and what's required for a constant battle with ten thousand demons !”

“Bravo, Triggs ! What d'ye say to that, Captin' ?” shouted old Pritt from his end of the table, whilst from the other end two downcast eyelids, the eyelids of Marietta, were lifted, and two splendid eyes shot shafts of admiration and sympathy towards the not unconscious object.

For by degrees the general conversation at the table had become hushed, and attention had been concentrated upon Triggs and his violent declamation. Lurline had giggled in open derision. Marietta had listened with all her ears and all her soul, but with drooping eyes, for, though she herself cared nothing for the peculiarities of Triggs' dialect, she did not wish to see the interchange of shrugs and significant smiles which she knew would be going on amongst the other guests. Caroline Farquharson had, first of all, been nearly convulsed with inward laughter at what she could not help acknowledging to herself was decidedly the vulgar tongue ; had then almost trembled with fear at the flashing eye and clenched fist of the rude speaker, and had at last been transfixed with admiration at his sheer audacity, rough eloquence, and heroic, Cœur-de-Lion-like demeanour.

Captain Davies, with perfect coolness and careless suavity replied to Mr. Pritt's question :

"I think the gentleman," and there was a scarcely perceptible emphasis upon the word, "is not altogether wrong. I don't myself think that soldiers have more innate bravery than other men; it is chiefly a question of discipline and habit. I think the story of the *Birkenhead*——"

"Ah!" interrupted Triggs, "that's a very good story; and, as all the poor fellers were drowned, *they* can't contradict it, and the other people that were saved wouldn't, of course, even if they could——"

"Oh! for shame, sir," burst in an enthusiastic lady, "no treason, if you please, against the memory of those *gallant* fellows!"

"Well, mum," proceeded the unabashed Triggs, "I was only going to say that, when you *can* get to the bottom of 'em, most o' those fine tales break down, like that about the Frenchman who is supposed to have said that 'the Guard dies, but never surrenders!'——"

"Cambronne, you mean," interposed the enthusiastic lady.

"That's 'im, I believe, mum," continued Triggs; "well, I believe it is known now that he was runnin' away, and bein' collared by an English colonel, he sang out 'Murder!' as loud as he could."

A splutter of laughter caused Triggs to fasten his glaring eyes upon a gentleman near him, and say:

"What's your account of the matter, then?"

"Very like yours," assented the gentleman readily; "I have no other version whatever to offer."

"All I know is, I had it from a fust-rate French scholar," added Triggs savagely.

"But you allow, sir," said Captain Davies, renewing the conversation which had been broken into, "that the soldier exposes his life?"

"Cert'nly," answered Triggs with indifference; "he's paid to be shot at; and what's more, he'd be shot if he didn't stay to be shot at, so I don't think much o' that. Besides, everybody knows it's odds against your being hit."

"All that a man hath will he give for his life," rejoined

the Captain, a little nettled; "and I am not aware that men of business expose their lives much."

"They do when there is an opportunity, Captain Davies," said the thrilling voice of Marietta.

"Ah! but I meant under fire," replied Captain Davies carelessly.

"And I mean under fire," said Marietta almost fiercely; "fire more dangerous than any battery; and they do it to save life, not to kill."

And whilst her piercing tones seemed still to vibrate through the room, and whilst all eyes—but those of Triggs, who was looking, with a strange smile on his face, straight before him—were turned towards the fair speaker, she rose and bowed the signal for the ladies' retreat. For the stage of dessert had already been reached some time, and Mr. Pritt, being of the old school, was accustomed to "sit" after dinner; for which most of his guests were thankful.

Captain Davies had managed to whisper to Lurline before she went:

"That's my steamboat friend; who and what the deuce is he?"

And Lurline had answered, with a bold and contemptuous glance towards Triggs:

"It's only something out of papa's warehouse."

And so she undulated languishingly out of the room.

As soon as the ladies were gone, Triggs obeyed a signal, and took his seat next to the giver of the feast, who, after a short dialogue and a hearty grasp of the hand, which Triggs, with an earnest expression of gratitude, extended under cover of the amply over-hanging table-cloth, said:

"I thought this'd be a good opportunity of tellin' you what I'd made up my mind to; then there's nothing left but for you to sign the deed to-morrow morning; but," he added suddenly, "we'll drink your health at once."

In the meanwhile, a desultory conversation—of which Triggs was the theme—had been going on at the farther end of the table.

"Who's the man with the dirty nails?" asked a dandified

young subaltern of his neighbour. "I should say by the cut of his clothes and his nails, he's literary."

"Don't think he's literary," answered the neighbour; "those literary men generally speak pretty good English. But he's a devilish fine man, whatever he is."

"A magnificent brute," assented a briefless barrister; "but I've seen many a fellow of just his style sentenced to penal servitude."

"He's exactly the sort of man to go off suddenly," said an eminent doctor, "for all his splendid build; especially if he were to meet with an accident that affected his head. Those strong men seem to recover very quickly and altogether from such injuries; but very often the mischief is only latent for a while. Under strong excitement they are very often seized with a fit and collapse like a pricked bladder. But does nobody know who he is? He seems to be very friendly with old Pritt."

"Dessay Davies knows," said somebody sitting near the doctor; but a glance at the place where Captain Davies had been sitting showed that his chair was vacant. He had slipped away to join Lurline.

After a little while, there being about ten gentlemen seated at the table, entered the butler bearing upon a silver salver, as reverently as an early Christian would have borne the head of John the Baptist upon a charger, a dusty-looking black bottle, which he deposited with a sigh—either of regret at parting with such a treasure, or of relief at having successfully performed a difficult and painful duty—at Mr. Pritt's right hand. Mr. Pritt, as soon as the door had by sound proclaimed the departure of the butler, cleared his throat, and said in a loud, strong voice, which at once enlisted general attention:

"Excuse me, gen'l'men, if I do what is unusual on such occasions as this; but I'm a-goin' to propose a toast, which we will drink, if you please, in the contents of this bottle. It'll just go round, I think: especially as I see Capting Davies has left us, and gone I don't know where, but, I *think*," he added, with a wink and a leer suggestive of his forthcoming

delicate joke, "for a stroll in Petticoat Lane. I rather fancy you'll find this a pretty good glass o' wine; and, though I give you a toast with it, it won't put you in mind of toast-and-water."

Having so said he filled his glass and passed round the bottle; and each guest filled his glass with a liquor more delicious and more inspiring than the honey-dew drunk by poets, and more lovely to look upon than the liquid amber that dripped from the fabled tree. It was as soft and precious as the oil that trickled down Aaron's beard; it was as golden-bright as a liquefied sunbeam; it was as sweetly odorous as myrrh and aloes and cassia; it was as subtly flavoured as the nectar of immortals; it was a glorified Sauterne; it was Château d'Yquem.

"And now, gen'l'men," said Mr. Pritt, "for the toast; I'll not keep you long, but just call on you to drink the 'ealth of my partner, Mr. Thomas Triggs, sittin' at my right 'and."

The toast was duly honoured; and Mr. Triggs responded briefly. After which Mr. Pritt added:

"The fact is we've only just settled the matter in a few friendly words, myself and Mr. Triggs; and I thought I'd strike while the iron was hot; it saves a deal of explanation to drink a toast; it's better than any formal introduction. Shall we join the ladies?"

And Mr. Pritt, amidst a murmur of assent, proceeded to hold open the door for his guests, as they filed out singly or in couples; but he detained Triggs to the last, and, taking his arm as they followed the others, he said:

"They seemed to be askin' one another who you were, Triggs; and I thought I'd let 'em know."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," answered Triggs heartily; "I shall never forget your kindness."

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER THE SPREAD.

AND so they entered the drawing-room, and there separated. Now the drawing-room had at the back, outside the windows, a spacious conservatory, at either end of which was a flight of steps leading down into other conservatories and out into the garden, which was, for London, a really extensive one. Beautiful, moonlit, starry, serene, and still was the night; and nearly all the visitors had by one consent deserted the house and were strolling about the garden or sitting in the conservatories, where, amongst the shrubs and flowers, there was the refreshing splash of fountains and the coloured light of Chinese lanterns. Many of the gentlemen were smoking cigars in the garden, and many of the ladies sauntered beside them. But in two of the conservatories were two ladies, one in each, sitting alone. One was Miss Farquharson and the other was Miss Pritt. Each was presently joined by a gentleman; the former by Mr. Pritt, the latter by Mr. Triggs.

"Well, miss," said Mr. Pritt, sidling up to Miss Farquharson and using his invariable mode of address under such circumstances, "and how do you find yourself by this time?" And he sat down on a chair by her side.

"I was *beginning* to feel very lonely," she answered with a smile; "but now you're come you must talk to me and cheer me up."

"He, he, he! I'll try, my dear," chuckled the old gentleman; "what shall I talk about?"

"What a splendid place you have here, Mr. Pritt," said she evasively: "it's fit for a nobleman. How nice it must be to be rich!"

"Yes, *that's* all very well," rejoined the old gentleman, "but it's awfully uphill work at fust. Now, when I was a very young man——"

"*Il y a longtemps, n'est ce pas?*" interrupted she with an arch look, "as the Duchess of Gérolstein said to the baron."

"I don't know any duchesses, or what you mean by 'long Tom,'" said the old gentleman, with an affronted air, "though I may be old enough to be your 'pa.'"

"Pray don't be offended, dear Mr. Pritt," she broke in, laying her soft fingers on his knotted old hand; "I have a foolish way of speaking scraps of French, and it meant no more than——"

"Well, I like plain English best, miss," interrupted the old gentleman in his turn, taking the soft consoling fingers and keeping them in his grasp; "but I was a-goin' to say that it's the fust few thousand pounds that's the devil—I beg pardon, miss—that's so difficult to get; after that——"

"It's all plain sailing, I suppose," she broke in, smiling, and not attempting to withdraw her hand.

"Well, if you only take care," he said, "they do increase and multiply wonderful; why, it's like maggots, miss, it is indeed," he added enthusiastically.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed she; "really you are very graphic, Mr. Pritt;" and she made a slight effort to disengage her hand.

"Wait a minute, miss, pray wait a minute," pleaded the old man, as he still held her fingers with one hand and fumbled in his coat-pocket with the other; "you've the loveliest wrist I ever saw, and I've something here as'll fit it—to a—to a—to a *t*."

And he drew from his pocket a bracelet that positively blazed with diamonds.

"Oh! how splendid, Mr. Pritt!" she exclaimed.

"Let me—let me—clasp it on, miss," stammered the old man, as he sank on one knee and proceeded to fasten the ornament.

"But really, Mr. Pritt," faltered Miss Farquharson, "I—I—"

"Sweets to the sweet, miss; beautifuls to the beautiful," maundered the old man, as he still knelt and pressed his moist lips upon the hand he held; "there's Lurline a-goin' to be married to Captin' Davies in a day or two, and Marietta, I daresay, 'll foller suit before long, and then——" he sprang suddenly to his feet with a muttered word which sounded very like "damnation."

"I only asked you if you had lost anything, papa," said Lurline, looking as cool and calm and demure as could be, but a little paler than usual, "or has Miss Farquharson lost anything?" she inquired coldly, with a steady stare at the lady.

"I have *lost nothing*, thank you," answered Miss Farquharson haughtily; "I *had* dropped my handkerchief, which," she added with a smile, "Mr. Pritt was kind enough to look for, but seems to have been too much startled to return."

And, sure enough, there was in the old gentleman's hand the handkerchief, which he had unconsciously taken possession of as it had fallen, during his address, from Miss Farquharson's fair hand, and with which she now dexterously covered the bracelet upon her wrist, hitherto concealed in the folds of her ample skirt.

"You shouldn't come upon a body like a ghost like that, Lurley," he grumbled, now half-recovered; "you know how nervous I am."

"I'm sure, I thought I made noise enough, papa," she replied innocently; "my dress itself rustles along the ground like a cartload of dead leaves." As if she hadn't carefully lifted her dress.

"Ah! but you forget that I'm a little deaf, my dear," he rejoined gently; "come, let us take a turn in the garden."

Captain Davies had been strolling about the grounds with Lurline, whilst he was smoking his cigar; and they had

arranged to enter the house through the conservatories, and by the two opposite staircases, so as to miss nobody who might feel disposed for a dance on the lawn by moonlight—a regular shadow-dance, as Lurline said. And so Lurline had stumbled upon her papa, who, though no conjurer, was made, willynilly, to perform the famous “handkerchief-trick.” Nor was Captain Davies unfavoured by adventure. Looking through the glass as he passed along by the side of one of the conservatories he saw a sight which was too much even for *his* imperturbability, and which caused him to stop a moment and mutter to himself :

“Gad! that’s pretty well for ‘only something out of papa’s warehouse.’”

What he saw was Marietta’s face in very close proximity, for a second, with the tawny hair that grew upon the face of the “something;” and Marietta’s waist encircled by an arm belonging to the “something.” But he did not hear Marietta, as she tore herself away from Triggs and then tripped gaily up the steps into the house, say in a low voice :

“I *must* go to look after the guests, or I shall be missed; good-bye, dear Tom, for the present. I *am* so glad, my darling. I shall not allude to it, unless papa does, even to Lurline, until the deed is signed and there can be no mistake.”

But the gallant Captain, as soon as she had got to the top of the steps, saw a white-clad figure move out from behind a very tall and thick shrub, and look after Marietta’s retreating form with eyes of astonishment not unmixed with a certain vexation and spite. It was Caroline Farquharson who had seen everything and overheard everything, and knew that there was no chance of her playing Berengaria to the stalwart stranger’s Cœur de Lion.

She followed in the wake of Triggs, who had walked slowly towards the door leading towards the garden; and at the very threshold they were encountered by the gallant Captain, who exclaimed gaily :

“One couple well met: we are going to have a dance on the lawn; I hope you’ll come.”

"With pleasure, Captain Davies," said Caroline Farquharson, taking his remark as applied to himself and her, and altogether ignoring Triggs: "if Lurline will let me; but you must give me your arm."

The gallant Captain did as he was requested to do; and then, turning to Triggs, said with extreme politeness:

"Will you dance, sir? You will find most of the ladies on the lawn."

"No, thankee," answered Triggs gruffly; "I'd sooner look on." And he remained where he was.

"He is afraid of being taken for the dancing-bear, if he *can* dance at all, which I very much doubt," whispered Caroline Farquharson to her cavalier as they turned towards the lawn.

"I saw you were paying great attention to the plants in the conservatory," he rejoined irreverently; "did you see anything *very particular*?"

"You mean," she answered, noticing his significant tone and colouring slightly, "that—that—well, yes, I did see something *very particular*."

"So did I," rejoined Captain Davies dryly.

"Did you hear anything?" she asked.

"No," he replied; "did you?"

"Never mind," she answered; "I was accidentally where I was, and I don't tell tales out of school."

"Hoho!" thought Captain Davies, as they now joined the dancers, "she must have heard what they said. I must set Lurline at her to find out what it was."

"Dancing," as the papers say, "was kept up with spirit;" but one by one the guests dropped off. Still Captain Davies had no opportunity of conferring with Lurline upon so important a matter that night. He determined to leave it until a more convenient season occurred. However, considering the position he was about to hold towards the Pritt family, it was incumbent upon him to find out at least who this bearded man was, and he was about to ask information from Mr. Pritt himself, when the old gentleman, who was exchanging "Good-night" with Triggs, rendered inquiry unnecessary by accosting his future son-in-law and saying:

"By-the-way, Captiving, you ran away after dinner and didn't hear the toast I proposed: it was the 'ealth of my friend here, Mr. Triggs; and I proposed it in consequence of his having become my partner. At least he'll sign the deed to-morrow; and then it will be all square."

The gallant Captain bowed, offered some sort of congratulation, and hurried out, more confounded than ever, to his cab.

The Farquharsons had already gone; and as they drove home in their brougham, Miss Farquharson said to her sister:

"That Lurline Pritt is a horrid little creature!"

"I think Marietta is the worse of the two," was the rejoinder; "her conduct is most objectionable—really indecent!"

"Dear me!" ejaculated the other languidly, "I hadn't noticed it, but I daresay it is; they both look no better than they ought to be. How my head aches!"

And at the exclamation she raised a hand to her forehead, and a flash of light quite dazzled her sister, who cried:

"Whatever is that splendid thing on your wrist, dear?"

"It is a bracelet, love," answered the other quietly. "Do you like it?" And she offered it for inspection.

"Why it must be worth a small fortune," said the younger sister; "how ever did you get it? What *have* you been doing?"

"Only spoiling the Egyptians," was the contemptuous reply.

And the rest of the drive home was accomplished in silence.

Mr. Triggs was the last to go; and soon after he was gone Marietta and Lurline Pritt were conversing in the former's dressing-room.

"How would you like to have a new mother?" asked Lurline quietly.

"That question rather reminds me of the Catechism and being born again," replied Marietta carelessly.

"Oh! you needn't be afraid; I shall not put you through *that*," rejoined Lurline, laughing; "but listen to me."

And she recounted the scene she had witnessed, adding:

"If I had been a minute later, Etta, depend upon it papa would have proposed."

"And you think she would have accepted him?"

"Accepted him! Why she would accept a paralytic with half papa's money."

"We can't allow that," said Marietta decisively, after a slight pause.

"Certainly not," assented Lurline; "but I can't always drop in at the precise moment and stop it; besides, I shall be going away, you know."

"Ah! your marriage," rejoined Marietta. "Well, something must be thought of: let us sleep upon it."

"Good-night," murmured Lurline, as she retired; "perhaps Fate will help us;" and she smiled the smile of hopeful innocence.

All this time, and for some time after, Mr. Triggs was walking home like a sturdy and economical man, and was taking short cuts through lonely and dark lanes like a bold man, and was felicitating himself upon his improving prospects like a confident man, when suddenly he heard a footstep near him, but he was not a timid man, and he took no heed.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CAPTAIN'S QUANDARY.

MEANWHILE Captain Davies had reached his lodgings in the neighbourhood of St. James's Street, and before he "turned in," had pondered, with the assistance of a huge cigar, over the position in which he was placed as regarded Mr. Triggs and the scene in which Mr. Triggs had played so astounding a part. Under ordinary circumstances he would have been contented with the reflection that it was no affair of his, and that, for all he cared, a body might kiss a body going through the rye, or sitting or not sitting in a conservatory or anywhere else, and he certainly wouldn't tell of or allude to the incident at all, unless the kissee happened to be Lurline and the kisser other than himself. But it was a very different matter when Marietta would in a few days be his own sister-in-law, and when it was pretty clear that the intimacy which existed between Mr. Triggs and Marietta was of a clandestine character. For the gallant Captain was by no means the sort of man to marry into a family in which there was likely to be any social scandal. On the other hand, as Mr. Pritt had taken Mr. Triggs into partnership, it was quite possible that, if Mr. Triggs' intentions were strictly honourable, the old gentleman might not be displeased at the notion of his daughter's taking the same Triggs into another kind of partnership; and, if the gallant Captain were to express discontent at the prospect of having such a brother-in-law, Mr. Pritt, who was on some points obstinate, irritable, and touchy, and always unfathomable, might display an unsuspected knowledge of what was

secretly going on between his eldest daughter and Mr. Triggs, might resent the Captain's interference and ridicule the Captain's pride, and might do or say something which would endanger the completion of the match between the Captain and Lurline. And of any such slip between the cup and the lip the gallant Captain could not think without horror; for not only was he desperately in love with Lurline, but also in a position of pecuniary embarrassment from which her fortune would extricate him beautifully. As for Lurline, he felt sure that if he were to divulge to her what he had seen, she, such was her contemptuous dislike of Triggs, would insist upon her father's being at once made acquainted with the odious wretch's impudence, so that the odious wretch might be forbidden the house. He was divided between two opinions. Chivalrous honour seemed to require him, if he spoke out at all, to speak out immediately: worldly prudence warned him to postpone any revelation calculated to jeopard his present relations towards the family of Pritt until he and Lurline were man and wife. In the latter case, too, said he to himself, he would have strengthened his position, and none could gainsay his right to interfere. However, he was still undecided, when he "turned in." He had only made up his mind that he would go early the next morning to Lurline, and see whether her father had yet enlightened her as to the late promotion of Triggs. Perhaps something might occur to guide him. Meanwhile he would sleep on the matter; and he slept on it uncomfortably.

Next morning, about noon, he was shown into Lurline's boudoir, where she and a second person were engaged upon a minute examination of certain articles which appeared to him to resemble unusually elaborate specimens of ladies' generally invisible garments. The second person was an exceedingly pretty girl, who had been announced a few minutes before his arrival by the style and title of "the young person with the needlework." She looked pale and worn and ill, but her face was suddenly suffused, at his entrance, by a lovely colour, which, however, passed away in a moment, and which might have been accounted for by a consciousness of a gentleman's presence at an inopportune juncture. But there was on his

part, after he had greeted Lurline, a look of surprise and a slight movement, as if he would have shown the "young person" some signs of recognition, but that she kept her eyes resolutely fixed upon the ground. His manner had not escaped the notice of Lurline, who had uttered a little shriek of consternation at his entrance and a playful protest at his unreasonably early visit, and had then said to the "young person" harshly and imperiously :

"They are beautifully worked and will do admirably : take them into that alcove" (pointing with her finger to a recess at one end of the boudoir), "and fold them up properly and then you can go."

"Very well, miss," replied the "young person" in a sweet, modest way, and with her eyes still bent upon the ground proceeded to do as she was bidden.

At this moment Miss Pritt entered the room.

"Now tell me what you mean by coming so early and catching us as you did," said Lurline to Captain Davies, and drawing his head down to her, as she reclined upon the couch close to which he sat, she whispered, "and don't stare after that pretty girl, you inquisitive man."

But before he could make any rejoinder there was a tap at the door, and a servant, having put a yellow paper into Miss Pritt's hand, said, "Telegraph for you, miss," and vanished.

Miss Pritt read the telegram, turned white and rigid as marble, made a convulsive effort to speak, and, finding it useless, passed the paper to Lurline, who, with a shudder, transferred it to Captain Davies, and said carelessly :

"Read it out, please ; I can't read those horrid things."

Miss Pritt sat gazing with her eyes fixed, her mouth half open, and her hands clenched, whilst the gallant Captain, having cleared his throat by a preliminary cough, read out (with just one interpolated "by Gad !" of astonishment), in slow and distinct tones, perfectly audible all over the room :

"' Mr. Pritt to Miss Pritt. Send skilful nurse directly to Florence Villa, Briar Road, N.W. Poor Triggs met with severe accident last night.—Not expected to recover.' "

He had scarcely pronounced the last word when there came from the direction of the alcove a faint scream, a rustle as of petticoats, and a dull thump.

The noise roused Miss Pritt, who rushed up and stood with flashing eyes and flushed face over the fallen body of the "young person." Captain Davies also rushed up, whilst Lurline rang the bell vehemently and then followed her lover: he had just begun to raise the "young person," when Lurline plucked his sleeve and whispered passionately:

"Let her be till the servants come; you shall not touch her."

"Stand out of the way, Lurley," rejoined the Captain sternly, "and don't be a fool."

She shrank back at his look and his fierce speech, neither of which she had encountered before, and both of which warned her that he would not be quite wax in her hands; and he had just placed the "young person" upon the couch, when two startled maidservants entered.

"Take her up to my room and lay her on my bed," said Miss Pritt to the servants; "I will come up with you and attend to her myself."

And Lurline and the gallant Captain were left together.

At first Lurline was disposed to be cross.

"You know that pretty girl, I'm sure," she said discontentedly.

"I've seen her before, certainly," observed the gallant Captain coolly.

"Oh indeed!" sneered she.

"I couldn't think who she was at first," he went on imperturbably, "or where I had seen her; but now I recollect all about it."

"Oh indeed!" sneered she again.

"She's the girl I saw on the steamboat," continued he good-humouredly, "the day I first met por what's-a-name—that por fellow that's come to grief."

Lurline relented; and spontaneously sat down upon the arm of his easy-chair.

"You officers have such bad characters, you know," she

said, putting both arms round his neck, intertwining her fingers, and looking reprovingly in his face.

"Eh? Oh no, not at all; not worse than other men, I should hope," rejoined the Captain, shaking his head from side to side.

"Not that *I* care about their characters," proceeded Lurline; "only I don't want *you* to have a bad one—at any rate any more. But do you mean to tell me you never made love to her—never flirted with her even?"

"Never, 'pon my soul," answered the Captain: "how could I, you know? Why I've only seen her once before, and then she was watched all the while by por what's-his-name that's come to grief, and by a she-dragon as well."

"You'd have *liked* to flirt with her, I know," murmured Lurline, with a playful air of discontent.

"Well, if you put it in that way," said the Captain, "I confess I might have done worse."

"You were in a great hurry to take her up in your arms just now," Lurline remarked.

"My dearest Lurley," rejoined the Captain, "I couldn't, as a gentleman, leave a por gal——"

"Well, well," interrupted Lurline, "recollect that you mustn't put your arm round anybody but me now, and you shall put it round me sometimes when you are good."

A spectator might have considered that the gallant Captain had not waited for this gracious permission.

"Do you think she is fond of that Triggs?" asked Lurline superciliously.

"Well, you know," replied the Captain carelessly, "what with their being on the boat together, and what with her fainting right off when he comes to grief, I shouldn't wonder if she was."

"If Marietta thinks so," observed Lurline reflectively, "it will not be safe to leave the girl alone with her."

"What *do* you mean?" asked the Captain, wondering what would come next.

"Etta has a fearful temper," replied Lurline; "and now I'm going to tell you a secret, which you must swear not to

let out—you'll swear? Very well—she's in love with the man herself."

"Good heavens!" cried the Captain, suspecting Caroline Farquharson, but determined not to show his hand; "how long have you known this?"

"About ten years," she answered quietly.

"Ten years! why how did you discover it?"

"Partly from outward and visible signs, as they say in the Catechism; partly from what she herself told me."

"But they can't have been intimate all that time."

"I don't know what you call intimate; but it is about ten years ago since he carried her out of her bed—she being just sixteen—in the dead of the night; and I should call that being on pretty intimate terms for a beginning."

"How did it come about?"

"He saved her from a fire at the risk of his life."

"Ah! I can understand a romantic girl under such circumstances——"

"Circumstances offering so favourable a foundation for an intimacy," broke in Lurline superciliously.

"I can understand, I say," repeated the Captain, "that she should have been something more than grateful towards a fine-looking fellow like that (for he is a fine-looking fellow, Lurley, for all your hideous grimaces), but as for serious love——"

"Oh!" broke in Lurline, "she loves him in the passionate and heroic style; it is like Cleopatra and Antony:" and she jumped up from his side, threw herself into an attitude, and repeated the lines from Tennyson:

"O the wild kiss, when fresh from war's alarms,
My Hercules, my Roman Antony,
My mailed Bacchus leapt into my arms.

Only *he's* no soldier, the great cur!"

"You'd make a sensation on the stage, Lurley," said the Captain admiringly.

"Perhaps I may, some day," she rejoined: "who knows?"

"But what's to be the end of it?" he resumed: "she can never marry what you called yesterday 'something out of papa's warehouse;'" and he looked at Lurline penetratingly.

"Oh! as for that," replied Lurline; "it would be better for us if she did; and that is one of the reasons why I have been so quiet about it all this while."

"How so?" asked the Captain, with an air of much interest.

"In this way," responded Lurline, once more seating herself on the arm of the Captain's chair; and clasping her hands together round his neck, and emphasising her remarks by frequent nods which brought their faces very near together, she continued:

"Papa, as you know, is very fond of boasting about the superiority of trade and commerce above everything else in this country, and of his having begun life with nothing (or fourpence, I think, is his favourite sum), and he talks with the greatest respect of what he calls self-made men; but, for all that, he likes them to be already made best, and I'm sure he would be very angry if one of his servants were to propose to marry his daughter, and would go nearly out of his mind with rage if his daughter were to marry without his consent, and would refuse to give her a single penny. Etta knows this as well as I do, and so she is afraid to speak to him upon the subject; but I have good reason to believe that she is becoming more and more infatuated; and if she were only to do something rash, as I fancy she will before long, she would get none of his money, and, ten to one, he would leave it all to us."

"Confound it, Lurley," remonstrated the Captain, looking very serious and not a little shocked, "isn't that rather cold-blooded and unsisterly?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" rejoined Lurline pettishly: "I've argued with her and laughed at her till I'm sick. If she is determined to throw herself and her chances away, we have more right than anybody else to benefit by it; she is older than I am, and ought to know better than I do, and if I expect to be the gainer by holding my tongue, still she wishes me to hold my tongue; and," she added with a short, careless laugh, "isn't it sisterly to do as she wishes?"

The Captain did not laugh in unison. On the contrary, he shook his head disapprovingly, and then said quietly:

"You evidently haven't heard a piece of news. You say

your father likes men already made best : would he consider his own partner already made ? ”

“ He has no partner,” Lurline answered.

“ Oh yes he has ! ” rejoined the Captain, smiling curiously.

“ Who is it ? ”

“ The por fellow that’s come to grief.”

“ What ! That Triggs ? ”

“ Yes ; your father told me so himself last night. However, you are literally correct in saying that he has no partner, for the deed of partnership was to have been signed to-day, and I should doubt, considering the telegram, whether the signature can take place.”

“ Perhaps—he’ll—die,” said Lurline slowly, casting a furtive look at her lover.

“ Lurline ! ” he replied reproachfully, and no more, as they were both summoned to luncheon.

After luncheon Captain Davies and Lurline went out driving in or rather on the Captain’s mail-phaeton, and in the course of the drive the Captain’s quandary was temporarily settled. Having discovered how much Lurline knew, he had no scruple about amusing her with a description of what he and Caroline Farquharson had seen in the conservatory ; and Lurline, who acknowledged that her father’s choice of Triggs as a partner, and the precarious position in which Triggs lay, complicated matters very much, assented, though from not equally generous motives, to what the Captain said about the propriety of doing nothing at all in the matter as long as the “ por devil ” was a helpless invalid.

The Captain was temporarily out of his quandary, but the course of his extrication had introduced him to certain disagreeable phases of Lurline’s character. She was certainly the incarnation of external loveliness, and as bright as a fine day in June, and as prone to cling to him as the ivy to the oak ; but he didn’t like the indifference she expressed for the characters of men, and the cold calculating spirit she exhibited amidst all her physical warmth and exuberance.

However, he was too far gone to retreat, had he dreamt of such a thing ; and her personal charms, together with her pecuniary charms, rendered such a dream impossible.

CHAPTER XVIII.

COALS OF FIRE.

THE "young person," it will be remembered, had been taken into Miss Pritt's bedroom and laid on Miss Pritt's own bed. As soon—which was very soon—as the "young person" recovered consciousness, Miss Pritt had dismissed the two maid-servants, saying that she herself would do what more was required. The "young person" attempted to rise, but Miss Pritt, not over-softly, pushed her back again upon the pillows, and said, by no means gently: "Not yet." The "young person" acquiesced meekly, and lay with wonderingly expectant blue eyes turned upon the handsome, fierce, imperious woman sitting beside her. Miss Pritt sat and glared at the face of the "young person," the eyes as blue as heaven, the complexion like honeysuckle, the lips like two rose-leaves, the hair like silk of gold, and the timid, tearful expression, and she would have recognised by her inner consciousness, seconded by the remembrance of a description given, the niece of Mrs. Maggitt, had there been no other evidence to go upon.

"What do you know of Mr. Triggs?" she asked Leila in harsh tones.

"Mr. Triggs, miss?" said Leila, assuming astonishment.

"Don't trifle with *me*," rejoined Miss Pritt, almost painfully compressing Leila's arm; "you fainted at hearing of his accident. What do you know of him?"

"I've been very poorly, miss," answered Leila evasively; "that's why I fainted."

"Don't try any artifice with *me*," said Miss Pritt passionately; "I am aware that you *do* know Mr. Triggs; and, now, *what* do you know of him?"

"My aunt has known him, miss, ever since he was a child," replied Leila timidly; "and he—he—has been very good to us;" and her sobs choked further utterance.

"How has he been good to you?" asked Miss Pritt coldly.

"Well, miss," sobbed Leila, "for one thing, he—he—put us—rent-free—in the house—we live in."

"And he often came to see you, I suppose?" suggested Miss Pritt suspiciously.

"Oh, n-no—indeed—miss; not lately, at any rate," replied Leila earnestly; "v-v-very seldom—v-v-very seldom."

Miss Pritt regarded Leila as earnestly as if she were trying to see into her very heart; and then she said sternly:

"Your aunt and you ought to be very grateful to Mr. Triggs, and there is an opportunity now of showing your gratitude. Your aunt is a nurse, I believe?"

"She was, miss."

"Well, I daresay she has not forgotten how to nurse. She must go to Mr. Triggs."

Leila hid her face in her hands and sobbed convulsively.

"Do you mean to say she wouldn't go? She can't be so ungrateful as that," said Miss Pritt vehemently.

Still Leila sobbed and made no answer.

"I will pay her, and pay her well," said Miss Pritt with a sneer.

"Oh miss," cried Leila, "it isn't *that*; it's—it's——" and she broke down completely.

"It's *what*?" asked Miss Pritt angrily.

But Leila suddenly rose up upon the bed, forced back her tears, and, with a modest but determined air which even Miss Pritt respected, said:

"I'll get up, if you please, miss; I am quite strong enough now. I'll go and ask my aunt at once; and if she won't go, I will."

"Indeed you'll do nothing of the kind," replied Miss Pritt, with a vehemence which startled Leila; and then she added,

more gently: "You're too young and inexperienced for such a dangerous case. Tell your aunt she *must* go; it's a matter of life and death."

"Very well, miss," rejoined Leila dreamily.

"She *can't* refuse," said Miss Pritt.

"If she should," said Leila, looking earnestly at Miss Pritt, "I can answer for it that she will send somebody else as experienced as herself."

"Very well, then," rejoined Miss Pritt hurriedly, "let it be so; and now drink this glass of wine; don't be a little fool, I tell you—drink it, drink it—it will give you strength, and get home as fast as you can. Your aunt or her substitute—not *you*, mind, that would be sheer murder—must be there before evening."

Leila was, in a manner, bullied into drinking the wine, which she would rather have refused, and into accepting several pieces of gold which she would have preferred to decline, but which Miss Pritt forced upon her for necessary expenses. As she was about to start, Miss Pritt stopped her, saying:

"Mr. Pritt will be very anxious to hear how matters go on; so that you must manage to communicate daily with your aunt or her substitute, and let him know every day; and as he has so much business and is so often out, you had better write to *me*, and put in your letter as many particulars as you can. Promise me this."

Leila promised faithfully; and departed, armed with a note from Miss Pritt, so that the nurse might have no difficulty about recommendation.

When she reached home, Leila found Mrs. Maggitt in a state of extraordinary excitement. That good woman, regardless of the hot weather, was walking swiftly round and round the room, and playing a sort of football with something which looked very like a letter written upon blue paper, and which she was kicking along the floor with great energy.

"Whatever is the matter, aunt?" inquired Leila anxiously.

"The matter!" echoed Mrs. Maggitt as she sank, exhausted with her singular exercise, into a chair, whilst Leila

dropped wearily into another opposite to her; "why villins, scoundrels, devils—that's what's the matter! Read that," she added, tossing over to Leila the letter written on blue paper.

Leila read it, and turned deadly pale.

What she read was as follows :

"Mrs. MAGGITT,—Madam, I am directed by my client, Mr. Thomas Triggs, to inform you that he has found a *paying* tenant who wishes to take immediate possession of the cottage which you have so long inhabited rent-free. Mr. Triggs will give you a week to find other accommodation: if you remain beyond that time, you must take the legal consequences.

"I am, madam, yours truly,

"DAN TRIBE."

"As if we'd have any more of his favours," sneered Mrs. Maggitt: "why the villin must have gone straight from his villiny here and told his lawyer to write that letter. And me to have thought him as trew as steel!"

Leila was silent awhile, and the tears trickled down her cheeks. At last she said softly:

"Aunt, we must heap coals of fire on his head."

"That I'll do, my dear, with pleasure," replied Mrs. Maggitt ironically: "the hotter the better, and I'll take good care the fire don't go out."

Leila then told her aunt how Triggs lay wounded and in danger of death.

"Why, Lord ha' mercy upon us," ejaculated Mrs. Maggitt in a tone of deep awe, "it's a downright judgment!"

"Hush, aunt!" said Leila reproachfully; "even if it was a judgment, shouldn't we be careful not to bring one upon ourselves?"

Then Leila told Mrs. Maggitt of Miss Pritt's wishes, and even commands; but the sometime nurse was inexorable.

"Oh, for *my* sake, auntie," pleaded Leila, "for *my* sake, and for God's!"

"For *yours*!" cried Mrs. Maggitt discontentedly; "you

ought to have more sperrit. As for the Pritts, it's just like *them*; they can think of me when they want a nurse, else I might be in my grave for all they'd care. And then he's been a good servant to them; but why *you* should want me to put myself out for that villia——"

"Aunt," broke in Leila earnestly, "remember what you have told me about uncle. When he was dying you forgot everything—how he had sold up your house for drink—how he had neglected you, and abused you, and even struck you—and you remembered nothing but the bright happy days when he was young and handsome, and sober, and honest, and loving. You said that if he had recovered you would have been afraid to trust him and live with him again, but that while he lay helpless and suffering you loved him as dearly as ever. That is how I feel towards—towards *him*. If he recovers he will be nothing but a sad memory to me; as long as he lies suffering, and it may be dying, he is my old good, handsome, faithful, loving, own—dear—Tom."

And she burst into a torrent of tears.

Mrs. Maggitt was deeply affected. She kissed Leila tenderly, and hushed the poor girl to composure.

"We must forgive, as we hope to be forgiven, dearie," said the older woman to the younger: "I'll go and I'll do my best."

"Besides," whimpered Leila, "it will enable us to leave here at once. Miss Pritt insisted upon my taking this money, aunt, in advance," she added, as she produced some gold, "and I can take a room near you, so as to be at hand."

"It was very thoughtful and proper of Miss Pritt," rejoined Mrs. Maggitt with dignity.

And so, before the evening of that day set in, Mrs. Maggitt was established at the pillow of the unconscious Triggs, and Leila found a spare room in the house of a petty shopkeeper in the neighbourhood.

Triggs had been discovered, during the small hours of that balmy morning in June, lying prone and senseless in the track of a mounted policeman. There had been no difficulty in finding out his name, his private address, and the style and

title and whereabouts of his firm, for all such information was contained in his pocket-book. He had, therefore, been taken to his own home, which was as near, almost, as any hospital to the spot on which he had fallen. A famous surgeon living in his neighbourhood had been called in, and the first thing Mr. Pritt on arriving at his counting-house had heard was the news relating to Trusty Thomas.

And now Mr. Triggs lay hovering between life and death ; and it seemed long odds against "the double event," whatever it might be. If he recovered, yet the very deed of partnership, which had appeared to him and to Marietta so important a move in the direction of fortune, was as yet unsigned ; and Mr. Pritt might have found reason to change his mind. However, what the skill and care of an excellent surgeon and of a gentle and experienced nurse could do for him was being done ; and, as he lay and moaned and muttered incoherently, every lump of ice that was laid upon his head was verily a coal of fire.

CHAPTER XIX.

A MORNING CALL.

As Lurline's wedding was to take place so soon, it was only natural that Miss Farquharson and Miss Caroline Farquharson should pay a morning visit at the house with the portico, rather sooner after the dinner-party than would otherwise have been the case. Besides, they had seen in the newspapers an account of a "murderous attack" upon a gentleman "connected with the establishment" of Mr. Pritt; and, though they did not identify the murderously-attacked gentleman with Caroline Farquharson's modern Cœur de Lion, they had a dim idea that they knew his name, and felt that they ought to show some interest in him as a person who had unintentionally, no doubt, but not the less certainly, provided them with a more than usually exciting topic of conversation. No sooner, then, were the four ladies ushered into the drawing-room and ranged "in position," than Miss Farquharson's voice, issuing from a cloud of muslin that seemed to float out of a lounging-chair, poured forth a torrent of inquiry.

"What *is* all this dreadful business we have been reading about in the paper? Is the poor man dead? Who and what was he? Did we ever see him?" she asked volubly; "his name, the papers say, was Triggs; and I seem to have heard it before."

"You saw him at our dinner-party," replied Miss Pritt, looking as pale as marble, and speaking in a slow, stern, icy manner.

"You don't say so!" exclaimed Miss Caroline Farquharson. "Can you describe him? Where did he sit? I think I know."

"It was the bear who sat next to you, dear," answered Lurline with languid indifference.

"He was more like a lion than a bear," rejoined Caroline, who had started slightly; "don't you think so, Marietta?"

Miss Pritt was fortunately interrupted in her not very successful effort to reply by Miss Farquharson, who broke in with:

"I do: the moment I saw him I thought of the lion-like man of Moab I have heard the clergyman read about on Sundays; I shouldn't wonder if he is very much admired."

"I'm *sure* he is," said Caroline Farquharson with a furtive glance towards Miss Pritt.

Lurline looked in the same direction, and laughed a short, scornful laugh, whilst Marietta met her sister's look with a gaze of cool defiance.

"But he is not dead, is he?" asked Miss Farquharson.

"No," replied Miss Pritt slowly and calmly, "he—is—not—dead."

"The paper seems to think he'll die," remarked Caroline Farquharson with another furtive glance towards Miss Pritt; "what do *you* think, dear?" she continued, turning suddenly towards Lurline.

"I really have no idea," answered Lurline with a careless yawn.

"One would think you didn't care," said Miss Farquharson, in a tone of reproof, but looking only half reproachful and half amused.

"Well, I shouldn't break my heart or go into mourning," rejoined Lurline, "though he *has* been very useful to papa."

"Are you sure you have a heart to break?" burst in Marietta so fiercely that Miss Farquharson half rose up from her lounging attitude.

"I am quite sure, dear," answered Lurline quietly, "that I have *not* a heart to break; I can make better use of it."

"But, tell me," said Caroline Farquharson eagerly, "do you think it was an attempt to murder? The paper says it was; it certainly was not robbery, for not a thing was stolen."

"The robbers might have been alarmed, you know, before they had time to take anything," remarked Miss Farquharson.

"I should think," said Caroline Farquharson, lowering her voice to a tragic whisper, "it was revenge."

"Why revenge?" asked Miss Pritt sharply.

"Oh! you know," answered Caroline Farquharson, turning eyes full of apparent innocence upon Miss Pritt's haughty face, "I watched him closely at dinner, and he seemed to me just the sort of man to do something dreadful, and to care nothing for anybody, and to make lots of enemies; something like a mixture of Cœur de Lion and Front de Boeuf, you know, fearing nobody, and sticking at nothing, and something like that awful monster in Tennyson who says, 'I compel all creatures to my will.'"

"I wouldn't give much for a man who makes no enemies," said Miss Pritt superciliously.

"I've heard that he was dreadfully oppressive to papa's workpeople," observed Lurline mischievously.

"But do you know how he is getting on?" asked Miss Farquharson of Lurline, by way of causing a diversion.

"You had better ask Marietta," replied Lurline languidly; "she has a bulletin every day."

"I am papa's medium of communication, as you are perfectly aware, Lurline," said Miss Pritt loftily; "and I am happy to say, dear," she added, turning towards Miss Farquharson, "that, though the poor sufferer" (and her voice trembled slightly) "is still unconscious, the symptoms are, if anything, rather more favourable."

"Oh! aren't you glad?" cried Caroline Farquharson with effusion, but with something like a half-concealed twinkle of mischief in her eye.

"Yes, dear," responded Miss Pritt with a full fearless look at the questioner, and with dignified composure, "we are *all* very glad."

"Oh, don't answer for me," said Lurline flippantly. But before Miss Pritt could make any angry or other rejoinder, Miss Farquharson intervened, saying:

"If it hadn't been for this sad accident, what a delightful evening everybody must have had!"

"Oh, delightful!" echoed Miss Caroline Farquharson: "the dinner was very nice; and then the dancing on the lawn and the flirting in the conservatories——"

"Oh! *you* flirted in the conservatories, did you, dear?" said Lurline playfully.

"She and Captain Davies were seen to emerge together arm-in-arm," remarked a Miss Park (a visitor who had dropped in), a little spitefully.

"Oh Carrie, I'm shocked! An engaged man, too!" exclaimed Miss Farquharson.

"We—we—we—met—at—the—door," stammered Miss Caroline Farquharson, "and he asked me to dance, as—as—Lurline was busy just then; that's all."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Lurline, who, however, had flushed slightly: "I'm not at all jealous;" and she gazed self-complacently at a mirror, and then smilingly at Caroline Farquharson.

"If you call *that* flirting," said Caroline Farquharson, "I wonder what you would say to what a little bird told *me*?"

"What was that, dear?" asked Lurline, with an air of deep interest.

"Well, the little bird told me," answered Caroline Farquharson archly, "that, amongst those magnificent rhododendrons in the left-hand conservatory, there was a strong flirtation between a handsome dark lady with a red camellia in her hair and a very fine, lion-like gentleman, with a tawny beard: but perhaps I had better not go on under the circumstances."

"Oh! pray go on; no tantalisation, if you please," pleaded Lurline eagerly.

"The little bird," continued Caroline Farquharson, "sang the rest of the story in the words of that ridiculous, vulgar song you may have seen advertised:

I saw Esau kissing Kate;
And the fact is we all three saw;
I saw Esau, 'e saw me,
And she saw I saw Esau.

Only in this case I don't think that either he or she saw the little bird."

"Dear me, Carrie, you never said a word to me about this!" exclaimed Miss Farquharson.

"No, dear," replied Caroline quietly; "I never tell tales out of school—till the proper time comes."

Miss Pritt, who had sat cold and pale and disdainful throughout this heartless chatter, flushed scarlet, when Lurline observed reflectively:

"Dear Etta wore a red camellia in her hair."

"And she is dark and very handsome," added Caroline with one swift, knowing glance towards Miss Pritt.

Miss Pritt turned towards the elder Miss Farquharson and asked:

"Did any little bird tell *you* anything?"

"No, dear; I don't keep any little bird!"

"Nothing about an old gentleman on his knees amongst the azaleas in the right-hand conservatory to a beautiful woman, young enough to be his grand-daughter, perhaps, with a pink muslin dress and a rose in her hair?"

"Why Lottie was dressed in pink muslin and wore a rose in her hair!" burst in Caroline Farquharson, alluding to her sister.

"So she was, I declare!" exclaimed Lurline mockingly; "and she had a rose in her hair, I remember."

Miss Farquharson, who had for an instant looked a little uncomfortable, recovered herself directly, and, addressing herself to nobody in particular, said, coldly and contemptuously:

"What is the use of making a mystery about nothing? The fact is that I dropped my handkerchief whilst I was talking to Mr. Pritt in the conservatory; he very kindly went down on his knees to pick it up; and Lurley came suddenly upon us at the very moment, and could bear witness, if she would, that that was all."

"Papa seemed to me to be rather flustered," said Lurline archly; "and scarcely to know that he had the handkerchief."

"You startled him, Lurley," said Miss Farquharson re-

proachfully, "by gliding up so like a ghost; you know he said so himself."

"He did say so," rejoined Lurline sardonically, "but I repeat that he seemed to have forgotten all about the handkerchief, and I should have said, if he were a doctor, that he was feeling your pulse or doing something with your wrist."

"You can say and think what you please," observed Miss Farquharson loftily, but with a slight flush upon her cheek; "I know that you *will* have your little joke."

Miss Caroline Farquharson, who had been staring with astonishment at the two speakers alternately, here interposed with an echo of the words lately used by her sister:

"Dear me, Lottie, you never said a word to me about this!"

"No, dear," replied Miss Farquharson, "why should I? You wouldn't expect me to think such a trivial matter worth talking about. But really we must go."

And the two Misses Farquharson took their departure, speedily followed by Miss Park.

CHAPTER XX.

A SICK VISIT.

Soon after they were gone, Captain Davies called to take Lurline out driving, shopping, and visiting; and Marietta was alone. She retired to her own room, but soon emerged ready dressed for walking. When she first left the house, she walked with her usual slow, stately, measured sweep until she was a half-mile or so from her own immediate neighbourhood, when she turned aside from the broad road into the narrower streets, increased her pace, hailed a passing four-wheeled cab, gave her directions to the cabman, and settled herself as comfortably as she could for a long drive. During her drive she took from her pocket, and fastened over her face, a thick veil; and then leaned back in the cab and pondered. And, as she pondered, it became plain to her that the state of things existing between her and Triggs could not be concealed much longer; that tittle-tattle was at work; and that some whisper of it would soon reach her father's ears. It were far better that he should learn everything from her; she would take the bull by the horns that very evening. And the bull would be so much the tamer, inasmuch as he was himself evidently hankering after Europa, in the form of Miss Farquharson, and was, no doubt, a little anxious in his mind as to how his daughters, especially the elder, would reconcile themselves to the prospect of having a new mistress at the house with the portico. It would matter comparatively little to Lurline, who was to be married in a few days; but no father, determined as old Mr.

Pritt always was to have his own way where his own selfish gratification was concerned, though in all other matters he stood somewhat in awe of and was pretty subservient to his two lovely and, as he flattered himself, fashionably-bred daughters, could fail to feel some misgivings about removing his child from her pride of place and some relief at finding himself not only delivered from the necessity of making a sort of defence and apology, but actually put in a position to act the part of the forgiving and indulgent parent. Yes—they were not going to have anybody to dinner that evening; and so she, whilst Captain Davies and Lurline were playing at turtle-doves upstairs, would sit with her father over his wine and tell him by degrees the whole of her secret. Just as she had come to this determination the cab stopped; the driver got down, put his head in at the window, and said with an air of surprise and disappointment, as if he had been mistaken about the social status of his “fare:”

“Here you are, mum: it’s a taller-chandler’s!”

Miss Pritt, totally regardless of the driver’s tone, descended, dexterously defeated his rather familiar proffer of assistance, and, with an air that restored him to his original estimate of her, said imperiously:

“Wait!”

He hadn’t long to wait; the “fare” came out of the shop, into which she had sailed leisurely, at the double-quick, rushed into the cab, gave the driver a sharp order to drive to a certain cottage, but not on any account up to the door, and, when they arrived, dashed like lightning and as noiselessly, after another imperious order to wait, up to the door of the cottage, at which she did not knock, but rang the bell as gently and tremulously, as if she were a timid beggar. It was, however, immediately opened; and with a whispered “How is he?” answered by a “Very sadly, ma’am,” she made her way, unasked, past the astonished maid who had answered her, into a little hall, and said sharply, but still in a very low voice:

“Fetch Mrs. Maggitt; say ‘Miss Pritt.’”

The maid vanished, and, in a very few twinklings of an

eye, Mrs. Maggitt came up from the lower regions, where she had been preparing some fever-dispelling mixture which was in the cup she held. A stiff greeting was exchanged between her and Miss Pritt; and then the latter said:

"Can I go up?"

"Oh! cert'nly, Miss Pritt, if you like," was the far from cordial reply; "please to come this way."

Miss Pritt followed Mrs. Maggitt into the sick man's room, and, at the very threshold, paused and made a gesture of surprise, disapprobation, and anger.

What ailed her?

The sick man lay pretty still on his right side, with his back towards the door; he was sleeping uneasily, and moaned and muttered as he slept; his left arm bare, hirsute, and brawny, was thrown carelessly outside the clothes; and his left hand tightly clasped the hand of a bright-haired girl who was kneeling at the side of the bed, with her face buried in the counterpane, and apparently praying or weeping, or, peradventure, both.

Miss Pritt, pointing to the kneeling girl, whispered fiercely to Mrs. Maggitt:

"What does *she* do there, pray?"

"Lor', Miss Pritt, it's my niece," said Mrs. Maggitt in surprise: "it's Leila."

"I know that," rejoined Miss Pritt; "come here;" and she left the room, beckoning to Mrs. Maggitt to follow her into an adjoining one.

Mrs. Maggitt put down the cup and complied.

"I thought *you* were the nurse and your niece was a maker of fancy-work," said Miss Pritt a little sarcastically.

"Quite right, Miss Pritt," replied Mrs. Maggitt quietly, "but I want some help."

"What for?" asked Miss Pritt angrily.

"'Cos, Miss Pritt," answered Mrs. Maggitt with asperity, "I'm not like that there monster, whatever his name was, as had a hundred arms and hands; it pleased Providence to give me only two."

"Can't the maid downstairs do all you want? Or the

housekeeper? For I suppose there is some old woman to keep house."

"No, Miss Pritt, she can't," replied Mrs. Maggitt doggedly. "And the housekeeper was so frightened and upset by the accident that the doctor thought she had better go away for a time, or I should have two people on my hands."

"You may have two people on your hands now, for your niece isn't strong enough," said Miss Pritt more softly; "she is evidently very delicate, and it is running a great risk to confine her in a sick room."

"Thankee for your consideration, Miss Pritt," said Mrs. Maggitt coldly; "but if me and my niece like to run the risk, I don't know as it's anybody else's business. Besides, Mr. Triggs has known Leila from a child; and now, when he knows nobody else, he knows *her*."

Whether Mrs. Maggitt guessed as much or not, she had caused the iron to enter into Miss Pritt's soul. But at this moment Leila was heard calling softly to her aunt, who hurried to the sick man's room, and was followed by Miss Pritt.

Miss Pritt, who responded with a haughty nod to the salutation of the blushing Leila, saw Mrs. Maggitt administer the contents of the cup to the thirst-awakened sufferer, who at once dozed off again; and observed, with satisfaction, that Leila stole quietly out of the room. Mrs. Maggitt was now got rid of; and Marietta was alone with the man she loved. She knelt down on the spot where Leila had lately knelt; she caught the hand that moved, as if it sought for something, to and fro upon the bed-clothes; but, every time she touched it, her hand was thrust away, and she heard the sick man mutter, with a sigh: "Poor little Leila!" She buried her face where Leila's had lately been buried, and, with a bitter but subdued cry of: "Oh! my darling; he doesn't know me!" she sobbed as if her heart would break. Suddenly she heard the rustle of a dress and a stifled exclamation: she started up and looked round, and there, at the door, stood Leila pale as death, and with parted lips and staring eyes.

There was nothing to be done. Leila plainly knew her secret, as well as she knew Leila's.

"Fetch your aunt," she said harshly and imperiously.

Leila staggered obediently from the room.

Mrs. Maggitt came; received, with no very good grace, certain directions from Miss Pritt; and exchanged, with an appearance of great satisfaction, farewells with that haughty young lady, who found that she had kept her cabman waiting to the utmost extent of his patience, though he was in the end fain to confess that if she did give herself the airs of a "hempress," she paid like one, too.

Mrs. Maggitt shook her head and soliloquised: "Ah! she's mighty handsome, and she's mighty proud of it, and she treats me like dirt; and yet, if it hadn't been for the care I took of her when I nursed her through the small-pox, she might have been food for worms a long while ago, or, what I've no doubt she would think worse, had her face all scarred and pitted, and just fit to hide under that thick veil of hers. But it's the way of the world. The rich folks treat us poor folks like the sponges they use to wash their bodies with; they think if they pay for us it's quits; they forget that though they can buy eye-service they can't buy feller-feelin'; and it's feller-feelin', nine times out of ten, that makes you take that little *extry* care which brings a blessin' on all the other care, just as a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump in Scriptur'."

CHAPTER XXI.

RESOLVED AND CARRIED.

MISS PRITT occupied in reflection the time required for her homeward drive; and the more she reflected the more determined she became. She would reveal her secret to her father that very evening. If he took things quietly and acquiesced in her intentions all would be well; she would then have no occasion for concealment; she might then go daily to the suburban cottage and stay as long as she pleased with her dear sufferer. But if her father objected and grew violent? Well, she too could be headstrong and violent; as headstrong and almost as violent as he. It should be a battle royal between them; and, whatever happened, she would not surrender. At any cost she must take strong measures now that she had seen a rival in her path; at any cost she must counteract the influence of that hateful, artful, bright-haired little minx. Her heart almost failed her, though, when she thought what her father was capable of doing. If he had one of his fits of furious anger and pig-headed obstinacy he was capable of anything—of turning her out of doors, or, at any rate, of leaving her penniless by his will, and not only of refusing to fulfil his purpose of taking Triggs into partnership, but even of telling Trusty Thomas to find himself another situation. And could she venture to imperil her darling's future prospects as well as her own? It was impossible to sound him in his present plight; but she had a thorough knowledge of her manly darling's noble nature. She knew that he loved her passionately, but she also knew

that he was not the sort of man to sacrifice everything for love. She knew that his great heart was dead set upon the "main chance," and that the use he expected to make of her heightened the sentiments of affection with which he regarded her. She knew that he might have parodied the words of the old song, and sung :

I could not love thee, dear, so well,
Loved I not [lucre] more.

She knew all this, and she felt no resentment at it, for she had been brought up to consider it a perfectly reasonable state of things for a man. She knew then that if he recovered (and she shivered as she acknowledged that there was an "if" in the case) and found that during his illness she had wrecked his hopes of worldly success, his ardent love might change to equally ardent hate, he might curse her folly and bid her begone, and she might see her stalwart Hercules flying from her arms to those of that bright-haired girl. Should she risk it? Yes, she would; the very thought of that tender, trembling, bright-haired rival nerved her and decided her. If her father consented, she would feel all the strength of calm confidence; if he refused, all the strength of wild despair; and in both cases she would have more reason than ever to take some strong measures for completely crushing that intrusive little hussy. Besides, there was the chance—most fatal of all—that her father might be enlightened by somebody else, and she knew that he would then be as pleasant as a red-hot coal to handle, and "no more to be bent than a whole regiment of the British grenadiers."

She reached home in good time to dress for dinner; and, after dinner, when Lurline and Captain Davies retired after their custom, she remained behind, drew her chair to a corner of the table at the end where her father was sitting, and said, coaxingly :

"It's so stupid upstairs all alone, papa, or with those two creatures whispering and giggling all the time; so I shall sit with you, if you don't mind, and be your Hebe."

"He-bee! She-bee, you mean," chuckled old Pritt, whose

acquaintance with the classical or any other mythology was infinitesimal; "you couldn't be a he-bee, you know; though you might be a queen-bee, or a queen of She-bee, like her as Solomon frightened into fits, or a booby, ha! ha!" and the old gentleman laughed at his own facetiousness; "but what d'ye mean by he-bee!"

"Oh! *you* know, papa," replied Marietta, smiling: "I mean that I'll pour out your wine for you," suiting the action to the word, "and talk to you, and all that sort of thing."

"That's a good gal, take care of your old father," rejoined Mr. Pritt, patting her hand affectionately. "I like to have he-bees like you, a-buzzing and a-humming about me; but mind you don't sting me—mind you don't sting me; ha! ha!"

This remark had an unpleasantly ominous sound in Marietta's ears; but she mustered all her tact and courage, as she proceeded:

"The Farquharsons called here to-day, papa."

"Ah! And how were they, my dear?" asked Mr. Pritt with sudden vivacity.

"Oh, very well, I believe; and they *looked* charming—especially Lottie."

"That's the old 'un, ain't it?" said Mr. Pritt, with much animation.

"My *dear* papa!" exclaimed Marietta in a tone of reproach, but laughing outright, "you speak of her as if she were Beelzebub, or, at any rate, some ancient hag."

"She's no chicken," growled the old gentleman, a little testily.

"Oh no; certainly *not*, papa," assented Marietta readily. "She's rather *passée*, I must own."

"Well, then, I don't think she is *passy*, as you call it," retorted the father discontentedly; "I think she's a very fine, beau-ti-ful woman; but woman, mind you, not gal."

"Quite so, dear papa," observed Marietta submissively; "I only meant that she hasn't much time to lose, if——"

And she paused, smiling archly.

"If what?" asked Mr. Pritt snappishly.

"If, papa," replied Marietta slowly, as she looked down at her plate, and played with some strawberries, "she—has—any idea—of marrying—a *young man*."

"P'r'aps she isn't such a fool," growled papa, with a momentary glare in his daughter's direction.

"I should say that she was far from being a fool," murmured Marietta.

"And knows which side her bread is buttered," suggested Mr. Pritt meditatively.

"No one better," assented Marietta.

"She'll look out for somebody that can keep her, and keep her well, I should say," continued Mr. Pritt, with the air of a showman lecturing upon the habits of a certain animal. "She can't have a hundred pound of her own, and she'd as lief die as not live well, and, particular, dress well, if I'm at all a judge."

"I think you're an excellent judge, papa," said Marietta cordially, and with a knowing smile. "I quite agree with you that she would consider a good maintenance the very first point; and I'm sure she would make an excellent mistress of a house, only——"

"Only *what*?" snapped the old gentleman.

"Well, papa, I think she would try to have her own way."

"She might *try*," Mr. Pritt began, with a fierce look; but he suddenly altered his tone, adding, "and quite right too, if she didn't attempt to come it *too* strong over the poor man. He'd be only too glad, I dessay, to give way to her—as fur as he could, you know, as fur as he could."

"You mistake me, papa," remarked the diplomatic Marietta; "I didn't allude to the husband. She would be considerate enough towards him, no doubt, but I think she would domineer over the household."

"Oh, damn the *household*!" cried Mr. Pritt, with emphatic alacrity.

"Papa!" murmured Marietta, with arch admonition, "your language is not parliamentary."

But Mr. Pritt did not seem to require the playful reminder. No sooner were the words out of his mouth than he assumed a crestfallen air, as if he had been betrayed by his feelings

into an indiscretion when he spoke so carelessly and disrespectfully of the household. He shot a few furtive glances from time to time at his daughter; but for some moments he took his wine in complete silence, which was at last broken by Marietta's saying:

"In a few days dear Lurley will be gone, papa."

"Ah!" sighed her father; "and you'll be a-going next, I suppose, and leaving the poor old man alone—eh, Etta?"

A thrill passed through Marietta.

"Could you spare me, papa?" she asked in a low voice and significant tone.

Mr. Pritt sat bolt upright and looked hard at her. She met his gaze without shrinking; and though she grew a little pale, she managed to smile almost gaily.

"What's up?" he asked roughly; "anybody been saying anything to you?"

Marietta kept a bold front, laughed, and nodded.

Something very like a gleam of satisfaction appeared for an instant on the old gentleman's face, but he preserved his rough manner as he rejoined angrily:

"Then why the devil didn't you send the feller to me to speak to me like a man, instead of your doing his part for him? Mean I call it."

"He couldn't come, papa," said Marietta plaintively.

"Why not? He ain't in prison, I suppose?"

"He is confined to his bed."

"When was he took ill? Directly after he'd spoke out, I suppose?" said Mr. Pritt with a sneer.

"He met with an accident that very night, or he would have told you everything the next day."

"What night was that?"

"The night of our party."

"And what accident did he meet with?"

"Nobody knows exactly; but he was found the next morning lying stunned and bleeding, with his head dreadfully battered, in Parkside Road," answered Marietta softly, as she dropped her head between her arms upon the table, and fairly sobbed.

"By the living jingo, it's Triggs!" said her father in a low voice, and with an accent of extreme surprise, whilst he made the very decanters jump with a heavy blow upon the table.

For a minute or two father and daughter sat as they were, without seeing one another or addressing one another. Marietta had told a fib, no doubt; and she was preparing herself to tell another and another at the call of diplomatic necessity. She was in an agony of suspense as to what would come next; and she did not dare—nay, she dared, but she did not like—to look up, in case she should have the unnecessary pang of foreseeing evil to come. Her father pondered, frowning heavily; but gradually the frown died away, and his face assumed the expression of a wary man of business who has discovered a pretty satisfactory way of balancing his accounts, on examination of the *per contra* statement. He laid his hand upon his daughter's procumbent head, and said, quite gently for him:

"Etta!"

She looked up, gazing tearfully but steadily into his face.

"This is a pretty kettle o' fish, my gal," he observed kindly.

"Is it, papa?" she asked simply, smiling through her tears.

"Is your heart set upon it, my dear?" he inquired gravely.

"Yes, papa, it is," she answered equally gravely, and without any hesitation.

"I'd made up my mind to something better for you, Etta," said the old gentleman disconsolately; "there's Lurley, she's got a Captin in the cav'lry, and as fine a gentleman as you'd wish to see, and a good-lookin' one too; and I'd made up my mind to something higher than that for *you*! A dook wouldn't be too good for *you*. You're as handsome a gal as any dook ever sees, and I could give you a pretty penny; and as for Triggs, well, he's a fine feller—a very fine feller is Triggs—but he was my office-boy once, and swep' it out."

Marietta was touched by her father's unwonted tenderness towards her, and his evidently high estimate of her worth. It was, therefore, in her most affectionate and most winning manner that she pleaded:

"But you have often told me that you began the world almost as low, dear papa; and see what you are now!"

"Quite true, my dear," chuckled Mr. Pitt complacently: "but you see, when you've rose, you make a new start like, and you don't want yourself or your fam'ly to go back to where you come from, else you don't git all you ought out of your rise; you don't lay out your capital to the best advantage. I meant you to marry a swell; and poor Triggs——"

"Mr. Triggs," interrupted Marietta warmly, "is at any rate a *man*, and a fine man," and she blushed scarlet.

"A finer feller than Triggs *as a man*," Mr. Pitt readily admitted, "don't walk; and he's a fust-class man of business, too."

"And he saved my life recollect, papa," pleaded Marietta earnestly.

"Ah! poor feller," said Mr. Pitt with a groan; "it's *his* life that wants saving now. But how is it," he added sternly, "that this business only comes out just now—just when he's a-lying at death's door?"

"I told you, papa," replied Marietta persuasively, recurring to her diplomatic fib, "that he only proposed on the night of our party, and that he would have come to you next morning."

"Why should he propose just then?"

"Because you had just taken him into partnership."

"How do *you* know?"

"Why, papa, all the gentlemen were told so by yourself, and he told *me*, as he said that of course you couldn't mean it to be a secret; and he said that a partner in *your* firm needn't be afraid to ask for *anybody's* hand."

This little bit of diplomatic lying was very grateful to Mr. Pitt, though he went on to say:

"Still you must have given him plenty of encouragement."

"I certainly always liked him, and I was grateful to him," acknowledged Marietta, bridling: "and I didn't conceal it from anybody that I know of."

"I could see that you cottoned to him," assented Mr. Pitt; "but I had no idea it went so fur as it appears. However, as it is so, I'll not stand in your way—if the poor feller recovers

and hasn't had all remembrance of the whole business beat out of his head."

Marietta threw her arms about her father's neck, and wept upon his shoulder.

"There, there, that'll do," growled the old gentleman, patting her back; "now let's go up to the turtle-doves and get some tea. I suppose we'd better say nothing to them about the future brother-in-law, eh?"

"Just as you please, papa," said Marietta haughtily.

"I think it would be better not," observed Mr. Pritt, a little anxiously. "Lurley hates him, and wouldn't hear of having her wedding put off, whether he recovers or not; she said he was no connection of ours, which is quite true; and then the Captin's a high and mighty sort of chap, though he hasn't got much more than a hundred or two besides his pay, and he might give us some of his swagger. Not that I care for him and his airs; but it would be awkward for Lurley. Besides, there's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip; poor Triggs may die."

He had preceded Marietta to the door, talking as he went; and, having uttered the last words, he turned the handle and looked round for his daughter to go out first. But she had sunk upon a chair and seemed to be incapable of moving. As, however, her father hurried towards her, she rose up with a great effort, passed her hand across her forehead, and said, with a faint smile:

"It was only a slight spasm, papa; I'm quite ready."

But all that night, sleeping and waking, she was haunted by her father's ominous words:

"Poor Triggs may die."

CHAPTER XXII.

A WEDDING.

You may be murdered but you cannot be married without witnesses, and generally more witnesses than are absolutely necessary to bring the deed home to the perpetrators. Especially if your own conscience, or that of your partner in the transaction, be such as is not satisfied with a marriage that does not take place in a church. It will be all very well to choose some absurdly early hour in the morning, when, as you fondly imagine, there are but few bipeds astir except yourself and your immediate accomplices, and the bird that catches the worm. You may flatter yourself that you and she who will soon be the better half of you, and the officiating clergyman and the clerk and the pew-opener, have the sacred edifice all to yourselves; and that no sardonic auditor is grinning behind a pillar as you promise in trembling accents to perform miracles of husbandry, and as you listen entranced to the scarcely audible tones, as if conscience almost prevailed over utterance, of her who vows, with a solemn countenance, to love, cherish, and (*ridet hoc, inquam, Venus ipsa*) obey. But the chances are that, when you and she have left your valuable autographs in the vestry, and hurry down the nave or aisle to the nearest point of exit, you will be startled by the unexpected and undesired apparition of more or less familiar faces, whether of relative or friend or enemy weeping or laughing or glowering as you pass.

The apparitions are most likely to be of the feminine gender, for the race of women sniff a wedding from afar

with more unerring instinct than that with which the war-horse sniffs the battle; and amongst the weepers, or grinners, or frowners, will, ten to one, be she whom of all the unexpected you least expected. There, perhaps, is your old nurse, whom you had almost clean forgotten, and who has been brought thither either from fond remembrance or idle curiosity, or a desire to see what choice her former nursling has made, and to indulge in consequent predictions, or, good faith, to keep herself within your recollection with an eye to future business. There, perhaps, is she to whom on a moonlight night, and amidst the significant whispers of innumerable leaves, you once spoke words taken more seriously than they were meant, and who now, as you brush past her, recalls, with one glance of reproach and scorn, that tender scene of long ago. There, perhaps, is the ferocious countenance of your old acquaintance, Robinson, to whom the lovely creature hanging on your arm was most unkind, and who, if looks mean anything, would like to quench his thirst with a refreshing draught of your heart's best blood. There, too, certainly, is the landlady of the lodgings you have occupied for the last few weeks, that you might fulfil all that was required of you on the score of parish. You were astute enough not to take them for only the tell-tale number of days; you flattered yourself that you had thrown Paul Pry and his wife off the scent by making a point of taking a walk every morning at the same hour; and you had ascertained beyond a doubt that your landlady's connection with the church did not extend so far as habitual attendance within the interior, and was most likely confined to a passing acquaintance with the exterior. And yet there she is with an aggravating smile upon her face, as much as to say, "I knew his little game." You wonder, of course, how they could have got wind of the matter; and you feel rather uncomfortable as you think of the proverb which says that ill news travels fast. But if, when all precautions are taken, it is impossible to keep a wedding secret and unattended, what may be expected when no precautions at all are taken? And such was the case so far as Lurline's wedding and Mr. Pritt's "hands" were concerned. There had been no ostentation about the matter; but, on the other hand, there

had been no concealment. Whatever Mr. Pritt was, he was no humbug. He didn't consider that the family affairs of his "hands" were any concern of his, and he didn't expect them to consider his family affairs any concern of theirs. He would have disdained the idea of, as it were, compelling them to make some joyful demonstration, on the occasion of his daughter's wedding, by giving them a holiday, their wages for the day, and a feast. He did nothing of the kind. Neither he nor any member of his family did or said anything intended to enlighten or mystify the "hands" in respect of Lurline's wedding.

He no more thought of giving them a holiday on that account than he would have thought of giving himself a holiday if any member of any family amongst his "hands" were going to be married. Nevertheless, there was not a mother, wife, or sister amongst the immediate families of his "hands" who did not know the very day and hour when Lurline was to be married, and who had not discussed with disproportionate warmth and a free use of contumelious language towards opponents what "Miss Lurline" would "have on." The good souls knew little or nothing of Lurline herself, but they were aware that she was young, beautiful, and rich, and the daughter of their husbands' and brothers' employer, and that is quite enough to make such good souls, being of the feminine gender, neglect their domestic affairs, trudge miles away from their homes, throng a fashionable church and whimper out their blessings, as the haughty, careless young bride sweeps past them on her way to the gray-horsed chariot. And so it was with Lurline. As she swept along, leaning on her gallant bridegroom's arm, many a tearful and tremulous "God bless you, *ma'am*," fell disregarded upon her ear; and when her husband whispered with a smothered laugh, "Where the deuce can all the people have come from?" she could only answer with a smile of disdain, "Goodness only knows."

Goodness knew that they had come, some of them many a weary mile through heat and dust, prompted by a vague feeling of gratitude and respect towards her father and sympathy with herself, not unmingled, of course, with sheer

feminine curiosity, to pray for a blessing upon her. Goodness knew, though she did not know, that they were the representatives of her father's faithful "hands;" and Goodness knew that beneath the coarse body-linen of many a one amongst them was beating a softer, warmer, nobler heart than that which was swelling with pride and selfishness beneath the lace-edged garment but lately bedewed with Leila's tears.

It was a very pretty wedding, as everybody acknowledged. There were no hitches or drawbacks. The bride, contrary to experience, had looked her very best. The slight flush upon her cheeks had harmonised well with the heightened brilliancy of her eyes, which were moist indeed but not with sadness, and glistened indeed but not with tears. The bridegroom, contrary to experience again, had been cool and easy as well as gay and gallant. The bridesmaids, by no means contrary to experience, had whispered, and smirked, and smiled, and ogled, and attitudinised; they had both by looks and manner expressed their unbounded approval of the proceedings; and, by the silent language of the eyes, they had betrayed a heart-felt conviction that the bridegroom had now performed the whole duty of man, and had set an example which all but the very scum of his sex should be eager to follow.

Old Mr. Pritt had been wonderfully alert, and had actually "given away" at precisely the proper moment, not the pew-opener, nor the first bridesmaid that came to hand, but the right "woman." There had been no fumbling after the ring, and no awful moment of suspense; it had been forthcoming at the very nick of time, and had been placed at the very first attempt upon the legitimate finger. Nor had it stuck at the knuckle, suggesting that the bride was a trifle bony; it had slipped down easily into its place; for though Lurline, being human, had doubtless joints and knuckles, her supple hands had no protuberances.

The clergyman had read the service in a sort of apologetic manner, as if it were a necessary duty but he was sorry to have to detain the company, in a genial voice, and with a gentle smile whenever he looked towards the young couple. The responses had been made quietly but audibly. The

officials had exhibited the cloudless brows of those who harbour no misgivings as to fees. Even Marietta, who, of course, was amongst the bridesmaids, had, after one anxious hurried glance round the church, brightened up, and smiled and beamed like a Juno released from care; for yonder, just under the organ-loft, stood that hated bright-haired girl. For the occasion had naturally made Triggs especially prominent in Marietta's thoughts, and it had seemed to her a very unpropitious time for Leila to be acting the parts combined of nurse and Delilah. Moreover, Triggs was now out of danger—in the surgeon's and physician's sense.

Nothing occurred to mar the ceremony: for nobody but Marietta and Miss Farquharson and a few bystanders, who thought the speaker must be mad, and laughed accordingly, heard a seedy-looking man exclaim, as the bride and bridegroom drove off:

"There go Baal and Astaroth."

There was a very merry wedding-breakfast, at which Miss Farquharson and her sister were conspicuous, but not by absence. On the contrary, they shone, especially as far as Miss Farquharson's bracelet was concerned, with extraordinary brilliancy; and she, sitting beside Mr. Pritt, was overwhelmed by him with attentions. The bridegroom, of course, had been obliged to make a little speech; and in it he had, equally of course, recommended his own example very strongly to others, a recommendation which had elicited a burst of vehement applause from Mr. Pritt, so vehement, indeed, that Lurline was much disquieted within her, though her face beamed with apparent delight. She forthwith began to rally the old gentleman:

"Really, papa," she said, "one would suppose that *you* contemplated a similar step."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the old gentleman, rubbing his hands, and nudging his daughter. "Would you object, Lurley?"

"I!" exclaimed Lurline in a tone of playful reproof; "I would give you away in church myself: but have you proposed?"

"Why, what a question, Lurley!" exclaimed the old man; "and before all the company too!"

"Whisper, then," she said, bending her head towards him; "we shall be excused under the circumstances."

Her father whispered just a word or two. She whispered back; and he re-whispered. All at once she pulled from her pocket the prayer-book she had used at the late ceremony, and handed it to her father, saying aloud, to the amusement of the company:

"Kiss the cross upon that book; and swear, sir," she added, assuming a playful air of tragedy, "to keep the promise you just made me."

"Hang it, Lurley," the old gentleman began testily; but Lurline broke in:

"Kiss the cross and swear, sir," she said with pretty imperiousness.

He did as he was told; but the satisfaction which had been spread over his features had all disappeared.

"Etta!" cried Lurline gaily to her sister, "papa has promised that he will not engage himself to our new mamma, at any rate until I return from abroad."

There was much laughing amongst the company: but Mr. Pritt did not laugh very heartily; and Miss Farquharson seemed to giggle a little artificially. One or two clergymen also had looked very solemn at the somewhat questionable proceeding, and displayed a very modified merriment, though they were far too discreet to make any formal protest or do anything disagreeable.

And now the travellers' luggage was all packed; the travelling-carriage was ready; there was no time to be lost; a hurried leave was taken, and away drove the newly-married couple under a very hurricane of slippers and rice.

"What do you think?" were the first words Lurline spoke to her husband; "he meant to propose this very day; but I think I have put a spoke in Miss Farquharson's wheel. We'll remain abroad for ever if necessary. Oh! there's no fool like an old fool."

"Eh? Ah! So I've heard," said Captain Davies, a little disconcerted at this filial remark; "but why shouldn't the old gentleman marry again if he likes?"

"Why, you dear old silly," answered Lurline a little contemptuously, "because marriage would make papa's will of no use ; and that odious woman would twist him round her little finger in no time, and make him alter his will altogether."

"What! so far as *we* are concerned!" exclaimed the Captain simply.

"No doubt she would," replied Lurline confidently ; "she would make him leave everything to her, at any rate for her lifetime."

"What a disgusting creature!" said the Captain warmly ; "why should she? We have never done her any harm, and the old gentleman has his business to give her a share in and all sorts of things that are not to come to us."

"There's the town house for one thing," said Lurline, "that is to come to us, and she would, of course, insist upon having that. Oh! I know that woman ; she's a regular harpy."

"Well!" observed the Captain with a sigh, "of course, it would be a bore ; but I daresay he would leave us something ; besides, he has behaved very handsomely to us as it is. We oughtn't to complain if he chooses to please himself."

"You're a fool!" said Lurline pettishly.

"Oh! am I?" rejoined the Captain, a little sulkily ; "at any rate, Lurley, if we stay away beyond our six months, I should say that the old gentleman would be absolved from his promise; and, what's more, he would certainly get riled, I should say, and alter his will : there's no promise to prevent his doing that."

"That's true," assented Lurline disconsolately : "however, I've bound him for six months; something may happen in that time. Oh! here we are at the station."

A charming couple, evidently a brand-new bride and bridegroom, travelling with their own travelling-carriage, whether by road or rail or boat, find all the world agog to serve them, with "nods, and becks, and wreathed smiles," from Charing Cross to Dover, from Dover to Calais, from Calais to Paris, from France to whatsoever nook in Italy is best adapted for a honeymoon and its sequel.

And Captain and Mrs. Davies were just such a couple.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CONVALESCENCE.

It has been said that Mr. Triggs had been pronounced out of danger at the time of Lurline's wedding; and his convalescence had from that date been making rapid strides. It had, no doubt, been promoted by a visit paid to him, so soon as he had been declared capable of talking over serious matters, by Mr. Pritt, who, with unwonted tenderness and consideration, unfolded to him the story (in a double sense) which had been told by Marietta, expressed an intention of offering no objection to its resulting in the natural and orthodox issue, and obtained his somewhat shaky but hearty signature to the outstanding deed of partnership. Mr. Triggs had also been waited upon by a certain officer of police, who, in the presence of Mr. Pritt, had put certain questions to the invalid, as soon as he was able to answer them, touching his misadventure, and had received some very characteristic but not very satisfactory replies.

"We're agreed it wasn't a accident," said the officer; "then the question is, who done it?"

"That's it, officer," said Mr. Pritt; "who's the scoundrel? Find him out, and I'll give you fifty pound."

"We must have a clue, sir," remarked the officer apologetically: "give us a clue, sir, and we'll ketch *somebody*, you may depend; you shall have value for your money, sir. P'r'aps the gen'l'man could give us a clue hisself," he added, looking interrogatively at Triggs.

"I wouldn't if I could," replied Triggs doggedly.

"Wouldn't you now!" exclaimed the officer with unmitigated surprise; "you wouldn't take yer revenge!"

"I didn't say that," rejoined Triggs gruffly, and with a peculiar smile.

"I think I understand you, sir," said the officer sympathetically; "you'd like to take and batter his infernal brains out yerself, o' course," he continued fiercely; "but," he ended insinuatingly, "though the feelin' does you credit as a man, it ain't safe to take the lor into your own hands, sir."

"Who said I wanted to?" answered Triggs defiantly.

"Well, you didn't *say* so, sir," answered the officer with a grim smile; "and p'r'aps you didn't mean it. But now, sir," he went on coaxingly, "d'ye think there was more than one that had a hand in this here cursed business?"

"Ah! d'ye think there was more than one, Triggs?" Mr. Pritt joined in eagerly.

Triggs made no reply, but he threw his brawny arms out upon the counterpane, and clenched his formidable fists.

The officer gazed admiringly upon them, upon the stalwart chest, upon the strong neck exposed to view, and remarked:

"A man 'd think twice before he tackled you alone by hisself, sir."

"That's all you know about it," muttered Triggs peevishly.

"It's pretty clear it wasn't robbery," said the officer meditatively; "p'r'aps somebody owes you a grudge."

Triggs gave a short laugh.

"Somebody *does* owe you a grudge, sir?" said the officer interrogatively.

"Somebody!" sneered Triggs; "scores of people."

"Ah!" rejoined the officer, as his chin dropped with disappointment, "that makes the job awkward."

Triggs pondered a little while, and then said, slowly and deliberately:

"Now, look here: I'll tell you all I know about it; and make what you can out of it."

The officer pricked up his ears, and his eyes were like two gimlets; and Mr. Pritt was all attention.

"I was walking quietly home," continued Triggs in the same slow, deliberate tone; "and just before I came to the part of the lane where you tell me I was picked up, I heard somebody behind me. I'm sure there was only one person by the footsteps, and, just as I thought the person would pass me, for I was going very slow, I was dropped by a tremendous bang on the back o' the head, and, before I could take a look round, down came another and knocked me silly. I may have got a lot more, for all I know; as I can't recollect any more."

"And not a word said?" observed the officer interrogatively.

"Well!" answered Triggs with an air of caution, "you see I've been off my head since, and had all sorts of queer fancies, but it keeps on running through my mind that I heard a voice say, after the first bang, 'That's for Mary,' and after the second, 'That's for me.'"

Mr. Pritt started and looked grave; his eldest daughter was occasionally called "Mari," though generally "Etta." She might have more lovers than he or Triggs dreamt of; love is sharp and rivalry is maddening; some one of them might have discovered how matters stood between Triggs and Marietta, and have been driven to desperation. If the officer should get hold of this "clue," there would be what Mr. Pritt called "a pretty kettle of fish;" and he began to think that the best thing would be to hush the matter up.

Meanwhile the officer had said, with a knowing look, to Triggs:

"Mary sounds jealous-like, sir: anythink in *that* way?"

"Certainly *not*," said Triggs emphatically, to Mr. Pritt's great relief.

"Oh! beg pardon, I'm sure, sir," rejoined the officer, a little crestfallen; "but you didn't say whether you recognised the voice or not."

"No, I didn't," said Triggs ambiguously; and he went on hurriedly: "I've told you all I know; if you can make anything of it, do; but, as I've said already, there's scores o' people that owe me a grudge; it might ha' been any one of

'em, and I'm not going to make a fool o' myself, and p'raps get into trouble, by exposing my private affairs, and maybe getting some poor devil's life swore away on a fancy that I knew his voice."

"Hear, hear!" chimed in Mr. Pritt.

"Well, sir," remarked the officer, eyeing that gentleman with astonishment, "I should ha' thought you'd ha' been for assisting justice."

"Certainly," said Mr. Pritt with dignity, "but not at the expense of the innocent and on totally insufficient evidence."

"It's only by weeding out the innocent, as you call 'em, sir," rejoined the officer, a little sulkily, "that we can get a clue; we keep on accusin' and accusin', and makin' 'em clear 'emselves, until somebody can't clear 'isself; and he's the man we want."

"Look here," observed Triggs wearily, "I may have my suspicions, and, if it was a case o' robbery, or forgery, or attempt at the sort o' murder that anybody o' the public might be liable to, I'd take my chance and tell my fancy; but it's supposed to be a case o' private grudge, and if I choose to take my punishment and say no more about it, what's the odds to anybody? So don't bother me any more."

"It's very kind o' *you*, sir, I'm sure," said the officer a little sarcastically, as he prepared to take his departure.

"Oh! is it?" replied Triggs, with a short, sardonic laugh; "I'm glad to hear it; good-mornin', and don't bother me any more;" and he settled himself for a doze.

Mr. Pritt, leaving him to slumber, gave notice to the nurse and accompanied the officer to the door. The officer touched his hat respectfully, but could hardly restrain his discontent, as he retired with the solace of a ten-pound note for his trouble.

"Compoundin' a felony, *I* call it," he grumbled as he walked hastily along the road, "and takin' the bread out of a man's mouth. I know his game; he means to take it out o' the feller's skin and thrash him within a inch of his life. But he may go just a inch too fur, and git my handcuffs round his own wrists, and a brand-new rope round his own wizen.

Wallop in' of anybody grows upon yer till yer don't know when to stop."

The evening before the wedding was the exact time when Mr. Triggs had been pronounced out of danger. He had already displayed gleams of consciousness; but on the morning of the wedding he was in full and continuous possession of his faculties, and he was not slow to avail himself of them characteristically. When he woke, he watched for some minutes a decent middle-aged woman moving noiselessly about the room. Suddenly he cried as loud as he could, which was not very loud:

"Hi! missis!"

The woman walked quietly up to his pillow and smiled.

"Who the devil are *you*?" he asked sulkily.

"I'm the nurse," she replied cheerfully.

"Where's Leila?" he inquired eagerly.

"Who?" she demanded with a pleasant smile.

"Leila!" he said peevishly: "or—stay, where's Mrs. Maggitt?"

"Are you sure you don't mean Miss Pritt?" she asked soothingly.

"Miss—Pritt!" he exclaimed slowly. "Oh! has she been here?"

"Not to-day: she was here yesterday; she brought me here last night."

"What's become of Leila and Mrs. Maggitt?" he inquired sulkily.

"I'm sure I don't know," she answered cheerily; "there's nobody but myself and a servant in the house."

"I'll take my oath they were here just now," grumbled Triggs; "I've seen 'em in and out a hundred times;" and he glared upon her with his hollow eyes.

"They'll come again soon, no doubt," she said gravely; "don't be anxious about them."

"I'm not going to be," grunted Triggs, as he turned round with his back to her: "trying to curry favour, s'pose," he muttered, as he settled his head in the pillow.

But the convalescence went on, and neither Leila nor

Mrs. Maggitt appeared upon the scene. And, somehow, Triggs did not care to question Marietta, who, with her father, had paid him repeated visits, until his health had been so far re-established that he could venture down to the city on business.

Had he questioned Marietta, he would have learnt, if she had told him the truth, that, so far from "currying favour," Mrs. Maggitt had insisted upon being relieved by a nurse of Marietta's own selection the moment Triggs had been declared to be out of danger. As for Leila, Miss Pritt could certainly have told Triggs a tale which might have softened even his heart; and Leila, as Miss Pritt knew, partly of her own knowledge and partly on good authority, had never been near Triggs since the hour at which Mrs. Maggitt had left.

Miss Pritt, as we have seen, was delighted to remark the presence of Leila at Lurline's wedding. The "minx" had not taken *that* opportunity of nursing Triggs, and, since the wedding, the nurse had testified that no such "young person as the young person described" had been near the place.

Triggs ultimately abandoned the theory about "currying favour," and, dismissing the matter from his mind with the general reflection that women were "a dam rum lot," gave all his energies to the completion of his convalescence and the prosecution of business.

Weeks and months rolled by, and Thomas became himself again. The sort of sympathy which had been awakened, amongst even those of the "house" who knew him best, by his dangerous mishap, had given place once more to the usual mixture of fear and hatred; his partnership had been duly recognised and appreciated, and it had been discovered that the little finger of the partner was thicker than the nondescript's loins.

When three months had passed, his honours, and dignities, and wealth were increased by his marriage with Marietta. It was a very quiet wedding, followed by a short honeymoon, though the announcement of it fell like a thunderbolt upon certain persons, amongst whom Captain and Mrs. Davies were most concerned, and the Misses Farquharson not the least.

"The idea of papa's consenting!" said Mrs. Davies, with flashing eyes and white lips.

"Confound it, Lurley," rejoined her husband cheerily, "don't take it in that way; I'm rather glad the old gentleman didn't cut up rough. I hate family rows. That fellow Triggs, or whatever his name is, isn't a gentleman, but he isn't exactly a snob: he's a wonderfully fine man too; and if they're as fond of one another as we are——"

He suddenly stopped, for Lurline was looking at him with such a 'strange look of mingled anger, admiration, and defiance, whilst her lip was slightly curled as if with scorn, that he did not know what to make of it.

"If you were not so handsome, darling," she said, looking wistfully straight in his face, "I should hate you."

And then she turned away from him, and looked at her reflection in the fathomless waters of the Lago Maggiore. For they were staying at Baveno, and were on their way for a stroll in their favourite haunt, where the *olea fragrans* smells so sweet, in the Borromei Gardens.

"I'm glad there's something about me you don't hate, Lurley," was all Captain Davies had said; but his tone was unusually bitter, and he was an unusually long while recovering his gaiety.

It was now the end of September, and about half the six months, during which Lurline had surmised that "something might happen," had expired.

The announcement of the marriage of Triggs and Marietta had affected the whole family of the Farquharsons rather pleasantly than otherwise. Mrs. Farquharson, the old annuitant, who, it had been remarked for the last twenty years, couldn't last much longer, and who would undoubtedly have succumbed long since to her chronic disease and her old age, had she not been endowed with a double portion of that *esprit de corps* which nerves annuitants to struggle to the last gasp and die hard, was quite elated. She now regarded Mr. Pritt with that eye of favour which is generally vouchsafed to such applicants for situations (whether of coachman, or groom, or bridegroom) as can boast themselves to be "without encum-

brances." She had hitherto, in her conversations with Miss Farquharson, between whom and herself there was a complete but, out of regard for good taste and possibly latent feeling, an almost tacit understanding, alluded to Marietta as the "*pierre d'achoppement*;" she now spoke of Mrs. Triggs as a woman who had shown a noble example in following the advice which Queen Christina of Sweden had given Louis XIV., when the young king was disposed to marry Cardinal Mazarin's niece, Mary de' Mancini. "*Il faut épouser ce qu'on aime*," the bold queen had said to the young monarch. Nor did the old lady see why "*ce qu'on aime*" should mean a person any more than a person's rank, or position, or wealth. And certainly, from the time that Marietta's marriage had been consented to by her father, he had visited the Farquharsons with an openness and a frequency unknown before, and Miss Farquharson had "spoiled the Egyptians" to an extent which had made her aged mother laugh with delight, and had caused Miss Caroline Farquharson to exhaust her stock of interjections. Miss Caroline was, perhaps, not quite so much pleased at Marietta's marriage as she desired to appear. She professed unbounded satisfaction at the notion, as she expressed it, that pride had received a fall, and that the haughty Miss Pritt had thrown herself away upon a common warehouseman. And she laughed to scorn Miss Farquharson's sisterly suggestion that "perhaps the grapes were sour," though she did colour a little when Miss Farquharson added: "Why, you know, Carrie, that you were quite interested about him at the time of his accident; you said what a burning shame it was that so fine and handsome a man should have been struck down in such a cowardly way; and I have seen the tears in your eyes as you talked about it." To all which Miss Caroline replied, with a toss of the head: "I can't bear to see or think of any animals, especially great strong ones, being helpless and in suffering; you know how I cried when that beautiful horse broke down at Ascot, and I saw him led away, with one of his poor legs dangling, to be shot."

And how did the marriage affect Leila?

She and Mrs. Maggitt had found an asylum with Perkins

and his wife, who were only too glad of their company, to say nothing of the small addition made to the Perkins' income by what Mrs. Maggitt and her niece managed to pay out of their slender earnings for the modest bedroom they shared between them, and for their scanty board, of which Leila, scanty as it was, partook so sparingly, that Perkins denounced himself as a robber, and vowed that she must live on her canary's birdseed.

For Leila had a pet canary, and she called it Tom.

What particularly pleased Perkins was that his "good woman" had now somebody to whom she could relieve what he was pleased to call "her mind," who could give as well as take any amount of talk, and who entered with the most sympathetic spirit into any abuse of Triggs. The consequence was that Perkins escaped, save an occasional dose during the night-watches, the subject about which it was most disagreeable to him to converse. For Mrs. Perkins and Mrs. Maggitt had agreed, and oddly enough kept their agreement, not to mention "the brute" in Leila's presence; and Leila, when she was at home, preferred to sit and work during the day in the bedroom where her canary was, but came and sat downstairs in the evening when Perkins was at home.

And her face, as Perkins had warmly declared, was enough to bring a blessing on any house.

But the first-fruits of that blessing came in a somewhat contradictory form.

It happened one evening, soon after Mr. Triggs had returned to business, that Perkins came home with such a woe-begone countenance that Mrs. Perkins, as Mrs. Maggitt and Leila were both absent, at once put him to the question.

"What in the world's the matter with you, Perkins?" she asked sharply.

"Sack's the matter," answered he, whilst his eyes made a most determined effort to cross the boundary of his nose.

"Sack!" she exclaimed in a low voice, as she went and sat down by his side; "sack! dearie; what d'ye mean?"

"I mean," replied Perkins, with a sob, "that Mr. Triggs has give me the sack."

For a moment the poor woman was dumb with grief and amazement.

"Give you the sack!" she almost whispered: "and what for, pray?" she added in a louder tone of indignation.

"He says I'm too old and weak for the work," said Perkins in a broken voice: "they must have a younger and a stronger and a more active man."

Mrs. Perkins sat like one stupefied.

"It's rather 'ard," Perkins went on, "after nigh upon fifty years' service, to be turned off with a week's wages: and me too old to have much chance of anythink else."

"He's a wicked man; he's a downright devil," cried Mrs. Perkins, bursting into tears.

"God forgive him!" said Perkins gently. "I never done 'im any 'arm, that I know of."

"Go to Mr. Pritt," said Mrs. Perkins resolutely; "tell 'im all about it, Perkins, and ask to be took back."

"I thought o' that," replied Perkins; "but, even if he'd listen to me, which is doubtful, as Mr. Triggs has the management of everythink, there's no tellin' what 'arm I might do: Mr. Pritt couldn't very well take me back without words with Mr. Triggs, and that might lead to somethink unpleasant between them and you know who, and everythink might be upset; and, at any rate, *she'd* ha' done me a good turn, if I'd a-let her; no, I'll not risk doin' wrong to others, just because I think I've 'ad wrong done to me."

"You're little better than a born fool, Perkins," whispered his wife.

"So you've told me afore, my dear," observed Perkins quietly; "but hush! here they come: not a word to them, you know."

The comers were Mrs. Maggitt and Leila; and Perkins had said what he had from a notion that it might be disagreeable not to Mrs. Maggitt but to Leila to hear evil spoken of one who had once been more than her friend. But it was impossible for the gloom that overspread the generally radiant countenances of Mr. and Mrs. Perkins to escape the notice of the new boarders and lodgers. Besides, the fact of Perkins being about the house all day had, of course, soon attracted

notice. It was not long, therefore, before Mrs. Maggitt, thirsting for information, had tackled Mrs. Perkins, thirsting to supply it: and so great was the effect of it upon Mrs. Maggitt, that, struggle as she did against her inclination to tell Leila, her tongue was too much for her will and wagged irrevocably one night, as she vainly courted slumber, with Leila equally wakeful at her side.

Leila said not a word but this:

"I wish we hadn't come here, aunt."

"Lord bless the child!" rejoined Mrs. Maggitt, a little snappishly: "what difference could that ha' made?"

Leila gave no answer, but turned round away from her aunt, who, having got a weight off her tongue, was soon asleep.

Leila passed the night, or the greater part of it, in thought and tears. But her remark had taken effect upon Mrs. Maggitt, though not at first: and that good woman was touched to the quick the next morning, when Leila, playing with her canary, which pecked at her finger, said in tones that seemed too pathetic for the occasion:

"Oh, Tom, dear Tom, I didn't think you could be *spiteful*!"

"It wouldn't be any use goin' away *now*," said Mrs. Maggitt at once, and Leila seemed to recognise the relevancy of her remark, for she rejoined quietly:

"Certainly not, aunt; all we can do now is to remain and help poor Mrs. Perkins as best we can."

From that day Leila, who had always been, according to Mr. Perkins, "more like a beautiful spirit that lives on air than a pretty young woman," became more like a spirit than ever, if sweetness and gentleness, and industry, notwithstanding fragility, and want of appetite, and bright eyes, and an almost transparent skin, be spirit-like. Mrs. Perkins scarcely dared to hint that Leila was wasting away either to Perkins or to Mrs. Maggitt, to the latter of whom the hint would have been superfluous. The poor aunt would look wistfully at her niece, leave the room, and come back with eyes that betrayed a "good cry." And yet Leila was not ill of any known disease. Change of air and scene the doctor had said was all she wanted. That was all, a mere question of

volition to some folks, but to those in the position of Leila and her aunt as easy to obtain as manna from heaven.

However, she did get a change of scene: she went to see Triggs married; and everybody knows how exhilarating to a young woman is the sight of a wedding.

Leila had never spoken directly of Triggs since her aunt and she had left him "out of danger," and, by tacit consent, her aunt had mentioned his name as seldom as her unruly tongue would permit. But Mrs. Maggitt had known perfectly well what was meant when Leila had said, "I shall go and see them married." She had offered no opposition, but, on the contrary, had gone with her niece.

Leila, taking care not to be seen by the "high contracting parties," had watched their every movement with feverish interest, and when it was all over she was seized with a short fit of shuddering. But she soon recovered herself, and though she was deadly pale, and trembled as she leant upon her good aunt's arm, she walked bravely through the streets to their own abode.

"He has won half the double event, aunt," she said as they walked, with a sad smile; "at least, I suppose so."

"Oh! has he?" was the discontented rejoinder of Mrs. Maggitt, to whom her niece's remark was as intelligible as a cuneiform inscription; "and, pray, what may t'other half be?"

"That's more than I know," answered Leila dreamily, "but I hope he may win it."

Mrs. Maggitt uttered something which was not distinctly audible, but sounded about as like an echo of the wish as would be expressed by a desire that he might "get what he richly deserved."

"There never could have been anything more between us, you know, aunt," resumed Leila.

Mrs. Maggitt eluded any reply by devoting her energies for the moment to viciously kicking a bit of orange-peel into the gutter, with an accompanying objurgation:

"Drat the brutes!" she growled, alluding apparently to the throwers of orange-peel; "they don't know what mischief they may do; no, nor don't care."

"I feel, aunt," continued Leila gently, "as if I'd lived all

my life, and shouldn't be sorry to go if it wasn't for you; for you see things couldn't be as they were, even if *he* were free. I sometimes fancy there's been a transmigration of souls; and that though I'm still as I was, *he* has been transformed into my little pet bird, that I can go on loving till it dies, or—till —*I*—die; and that we didn't see *him* to-day, but some very different creature in his likeness."

"Lor', Leila," rejoined Mrs. Maggitt forbiddingly, "I do believe you've been at them yaller-covered books agin. I'm thankful we're at home once more, for you look more like to faint than anything else. Now do get indoors and see if you can't eat a bit o' victuals for once, and look and speak like a Christian gal."

Leila had obtained a change of scene, if not of air; but the effects were not beneficial, to judge from outward appearances. She grew lovelier and lovelier, but thinner and thinner; and poor Mrs. Maggitt could never look at her without finding herself at once on the point of whimpering.

At last, after some weeks, Perkins and his wife and Mrs. Maggitt sat in solemn and secret conclave, and came to the conclusion that before the month of October was gone Leila must by hook or crook be removed into what they considered the country, to wit, the suburbs, and have change of air and perfect rest. This determination having been come to, and a committee of ways and means having been held, the matter was postponed for a week. At the end of that week a vehicle drove up to and away from the house where Leila had found a home. It was a curious vehicle, drawn by one long-tailed black horse. It was divided into two compartments, of which that nearest the shafts had windows of ground-glass, and the other had windows of plain glass, through which were discernible three persons with white handkerchiefs held to their faces. They were Mr. and Mrs. Perkins and Mrs. Maggitt, who occupied one compartment; the other was occupied by Leila—in her coffin.

So they drove her into the suburbs, where she had change of air and perfect rest.

Such were some of the events which had followed the complete convalescence of Mr Triggs.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MR. PRITT EXPLAINS.

THE six months during which Captain and Mrs. Davies were to remain abroad were drawing to a close. It was the end of November; a cold, bitter, sullen, nipping November. There was a cruel, cutting wind from the east; a wind that seemed to make the very dead leaves shiver and shriek as they fled before it, and the poor bare trees bend down their heads and moan with anguish. It came with a rush and a whirr, and made the strongest men gasp as they turned a corner: it caused you to grin with pain, as if you had received a slash across the face with a whip, and, even as you grinned, it took advantage of the opening and got into your hollow tooth, laying the eggs of toothache, neuralgia, and all manner of agonies and swellings.

In such weather Mr. Pritt did not venture out much of an evening, though he was punctual enough at business; he was feeling a little shaky, and he abstained, in such weather, from going out at night, even to the Farquharsons'. To Mr. Triggs, however, weather was a matter of indifference, and an east wind as any other wind, only a little fresher, so that it was with quite a genial glow upon his face that he arrived one evening in the dining-room of the house with the portico at Notting Hill. Mr. Pritt sat cowering beside a blazing fire; and, as his partner strode briskly up the room to shake hands with him, he said discontentedly and even enviously:

"Hang it, Triggs, you needn't look so cheerful this weather; ain't yer froze?"

"Oh no, sir," answered Triggs, who seldom omitted the title of respect, whether from habit or policy, "jest a little lively and tingly, that's all."

"You're made o' cast-iron, I believe," muttered the old gentleman; "I shiver as if I had the palsy; and I'm not sure I haven't. The wind's like knives, isn't it?" he snarled.

"There's a fresh breeze, sir," replied Triggs heartily.

"Breeze be hanged," rejoined the old gentleman sulkily; "let's see what a bit o' dinner will do for us."

And the worthy partners sat down to an excellent dinner, to which Mr. Triggs did full justice. Mr. Pritt's appetite, however, was not good; and he was very abstemious in the matter of wine.

"Three glasses o' dry sherry, Triggs," he whimpered dolorously; "that's all I must drink; the doctor says he can't let me have any more. And nothin' but a glass or two o' claret after dinner: fancy claret this weather! I have to be very careful about my diet, Triggs; and there's the livery-dinner next week—I don't know what I shall do."

"I wouldn't go, sir, if I was you," said Triggs.

"Not go!" screamed the old gentleman; "why I haven't missed once since I was elected on the committee. Besides, I'm Master this year; and, what d'ye think, Triggs?" he added in a solemn voice, "I've got the Master o' the Breeches-makers to come!"

"Ah!" replied Triggs with an air of deep interest, "that makes a great difference, of course."

"I couldn't leave *him* in the lurch, you know," observed Mr. Pritt decisively.

"Cert'nly not, sir," assented Triggs.

"The trouble I had to git him!" exclaimed Mr. Pritt; "I was at him for six months, off and on, and I shouldn't have got him then, only he wanted some votes o' mine."

"Ah! he's a M.P. too, so he is," observed Triggs, as if that decided the matter.

"Yes," assented Mr. Pritt, "we put him in; and there's

another thing, you know, Triggs ; if I didn't appear in my place as Master o' the Company, and do my dooty as Master, they'd be spreadin' all kinds o' nasty reports about me, sayin' I was goin' to die, and all that : you know what they are, Triggs—like a cat after a mouse, watchin' for the old 'uns to die off. And I'm not a-goin' to die jest yet, if I know it."

"Not you, sir," rejoined Triggs cheerily, but with an earnest, curious look at his senior partner, as the latter drooped his head and became absorbed for a moment in contemplation, apparently, of some interesting idea.

Whilst the table is being cleared by an impassive manservant and the dessert is being placed thereon, the opportunity may be taken of stating why the Master of the Worshipful Company of Breeches-makers should be so important a personage in the estimation both of Mr. Pritt and of Mr. Triggs. It cannot be necessary to tell anybody who knows anything that the Breeches-makers are one of the twelve great companies ; whereas Mr. Pritt and Mr. Triggs belonged to the Flounders, a small, though wealthy, company, which Mr. Pritt had originally joined, because he saw his way to gaining a certain sort of position, which he valued highly, more speedily than if he had become a candidate for election to one of the large companies. Mr. Triggs had followed, as a matter of course, in the wake of Mr. Pritt. Now it is the ambition of the smaller companies, if they can never hope to attain unto the dignity of the great, to appear at least in the same category with them, even as the tail of David's mighty men are mentioned in the list with the first three. Great, therefore, is the competition between the smaller companies for the presence at their feasts of those who hold office in the mystic twelve ; and any Master of the former who can introduce as a guest a Master of the latter is looked upon as a being possessed of superhuman influence, and as having covered his company with glory. For the Master of the great company will assuredly have to make a speech, in which he must say something civil, patronising as it may be, about the smaller company ; and the members of the latter swell with pride even more than with good cheer.

When the table had been cleared, and the dessert set on, Mr. Pritt woke up from the contemplation in which he had been buried, and said abruptly :

"Triggs, I want to speak to you."

"By all means, sir," rejoined Triggs, assuming an attitude of profound attention.

"What I'm a-going to say," resumed Mr. Pritt, "concerns you, both as my son-in-law and my partner. That Mrs. Joyce that you and Etta got for me as my housekeeper is a very nice woman, and makes me very comfortable."

"Glad to hear it, sir," said Triggs gruffly, as the old man paused.

"Very comfortable," repeated the old man emphatically, "and I feel very lonely," he added querulously, "now Etta and Lurley are both gone. I don't know what I should do without Mrs. Joyce; she makes me so comfortable; and she's very well connected, ain't she?"

"I believe she is, sir," replied Triggs, a little stiffly : "she's a lady born and bred, I understand : and she's the widow of a professional man."

"Just so; she plays to me, and she sings to me, and she has a game o' backgammon with me, when I ask her," said the old gentleman, and, suddenly assuming a cunning leer, he added, "and she thinks she's a-going to marry me."

"Sir!" exclaimed Triggs in astonishment.

"But she isn't!" said the old man below his breath : "ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Triggs in hearty echo.

"She's always a-talking about the comfort of married life," resumed the old gentleman, "and a-hinting that, however handy a woman may be to her employer, she can never be so handy as a wife could be; and I always sigh and shake my head, and lead her on beautiful. D'ye know why?"

"Well, sir," answered Triggs, "I s'pose it's good fun."

"Yes, it's very good fun," assented the old man : "and the best o' the fun is that she's not so very far out in one way, only she's got hold o' the wrong end o' the stick."

"I don't quite understand, sir," observed Triggs, smiling.

"Well, then, I'll tell you, as I feel bound to do," rejoined the old man; "and don't interrupt me till I've done. I've been thinking for some time o' getting married, afore Lurley was married and afore you was married. I daresay you've heard from Etta how I promised Lurley that I wouldn't do anything in that line until she came back from abroad; but her six months are nearly up now, and I shan't wait a moment after. I've made things all right, you may depend; and so Mrs. Joyce is quite correct in supposing that I'm in a fair way to be married, but not to Mrs. Joyce. You are aware that my marriage will make my will void, and all that; and that's the reason I felt bound to let you know, as an honest, straightforward man, like I've always bin; but," he added with a haughty air, and a touch of his pristine self-reliance and stubbornness, "if you and Etta, and the Capting and Lurline, don't like it, I'm my own master, and shall do as I please."

Mr. Triggs was a man quick to make up his mind under difficulties; his countenance would have betrayed some emotion had Mr. Pritt looked at it instead of at vacancy during the explanation, but he now cleared it in a moment, and replied quite cheerily:

"It is very kind of you, sir, to have opened your mind so freely; you are quite right to do as you please, and I think I may answer for Etta that she will join me in wishing you joy, and hoping that you'll 'ave many years of 'appiness."

"Thankee, Triggs, thankee," said the old man, warmly shaking the other's proffered hand; "I shan't tell you the lady's name though, as I *may* change my mind, and, to keep my promise to Lurley, I haven't yet spoken the word, though, as I told you, I've made it all right. Good-night, Triggs, good-night, if you must go. I'm glad I've relieved my mind; and if you and Etta take it so well, I don't seem to care so much about Lurley and the Capting; I'm sure I've behaved handsome enough to *them*, even if I shouldn't leave 'em a penny in my will. And you'll have no call to grumble, I daresay. Good-night!"

CHAPTER XXV.

SOMETHING IN THE WIND.

MR. TRIGGS took his departure, and had material for profound reflection as he walked home. He knew, or at any rate he thought that he knew, though Mr. Pritt had not told him, the lady's name: for Marietta had not been reticent about the scene in the conservatory. In so brown a study, indeed, did Mr. Triggs stride along, revolving the chances of the "double event" and cognate matters, that he was scarcely conscious of what went on around him. Yet it seemed to him as if the bitter wind, as it moaned and whistled about him, plaintively repeated his own name. "Mr. Triggs!" in the swirl of the dust; "Mr. Twiggs!" in the rustle of the dead leaves from an occasional tree; "Mr. Twiggs!" in the whish of the flaring gas, seemed to fall upon his ear. He was quite sure, at last, that he heard the pattering of feet, the flutter of petticoats, and a faint voice pleading breathlessly: "Oh! pray, Mr. Triggs." He was in a dark side-street, where there were but a few dim lamps, and, as he stopped and looked angrily on one side, he saw a wan, pinched face, under a dirty tawdry bonnet, a thin summerly dress, which the wind seemed likely to tear into ribands, a scanty worn-out shawl, and boots as thin as dancing-pumps.

"What d'ye want with *me*?" asked Triggs sternly of the figure thus apparelled.

"Please, sir, I'm Mary," was the half-whispered answer from trembling lips, all pale with cold and privation.

"Mary who?"

"Don't you recollect Mary, sir? Poor Mary, as you turned out o' doors?"

"Oh! I recollect you; you're the gal that wouldn't keep hours, and ran away from your place."

"Oh! Mr. Triggs, I did try so hard to get in, but I was locked out, sir, and I couldn't make the bell speak; and I went to what I thought was a respectable 'ouse, meaning to come back and beg parding in the morning, and—and—and——" a convulsive fit of crying stopped her utterance.

"Well, what?" asked Triggs coldly.

"Oh! Mr. Triggs, they were awful people; they—they—dr—drugged me, and I'm—I'm—redooced to—*this*."

"Don't tell *me*!" said Triggs harshly: "you're like the rest of 'em; you go on what you call the spree, and then, when the reckonin' comes, you trump up this sort of story. Now, what d'ye want with *me*?"

"Oh! sir, I've tried and tried, and I can't get a place; and I'm ill and downright starving; I haven't tasted bit nor sup, to speak of, for pretty nigh six days: it's a wonder I'm alive."

Mr. Triggs moved closer to the girl, and said between his teeth:

"Look here—where's Bent?"

"I don't know, sir," answered the poor girl, shuddering and becoming, if possible, still paler.

"You do," replied Triggs sternly; "come, tell me, where's Bent?"

"Oh! Mr. Triggs," sobbed the girl hysterically; "I've never set eyes upon him since that dreadful night: after what happened, I dursn't have spoke to him, nor hardly have looked at him."

"Where's Bent?" repeated Triggs impatiently: "I'll make it well worth your while to tell me."

"As God is my witness, I don't know," said the girl in low, solemn tones.

Triggs turned angrily upon his heel; the girl clung to his skirt.

"Mr. Triggs," she pleaded in agony, "you're a hard man,

but don't have my death at your door as well as all the rest."

"Where's Bent?" again said Triggs fiercely: but the only reply was choked in the girl's throat.

"Now, look here," said Triggs sternly; "there's a policeman coming; I'll not use force to you, but, if you don't leave go, I'll hand you over to him."

"God forgive you, you are a cruel man," sighed the girl, as she relaxed her hold and fell back into a doorway.

Mr. Triggs walked briskly homewards.

Mr. Triggs was right about the policeman. That functionary, who with eagle-eye, or rather bull's-eye, had detected the couple in the distance and had misinterpreted the whole scene, came gaily up to the doorway where poor Mary was leaning and panting.

"Well, miss, and how's the bank? Good for a little sixpence this cold night, I dessay," he observed insinuatingly; but the wretched girl made no answer—only trembled like a leaf. "Come, you know," said the officer, changing his tone; "you must come out o' that."

Poor Mary staggered painfully into the middle of the pavement.

"Move on, my gal," observed the officer, but not harshly, "or I shall have to run you in. I see what you was up to; and that'll never do. On you go!"

He gave her scarcely more than a gentle push in the back, and down she dropped prone upon the ground.

"Get up, can't yer," said the officer, in a tone of annoyance; but there was neither voice nor motion. He lifted her easily, she was light as emptiness; and blood was trickling down from her nostrils.

"Here's a precious mess!" he muttered with disgust; "drunk and incapable, I s'pose; we must have the stretcher for you, my gal."

He summoned with his rattle a comrade, who at once perceived the situation, saying, "Drunk agen, I see; why, I can smell rum where I am."

This was a clincher, for his nose was not near Mary's face; indeed it was quite close to his comrade's own mouth.

So a stretcher was fetched; Mary was carried to the nearest police-station, and the sergeant who took the charge "smelt rum," as he afterwards deposed on oath, "the moment she was brought in," which, it is not irrelevant to observe, was also the moment when the constable who had found her "drunk and incapable" would have entered the station and opened his mouth to explain the state of the case.

So they put poor Mary in a cold cell, where she lay gurgling and moaning upon a wooden bed with a wooden pillow under her head; and there they left her to "sleep it off."

"She'll be at her tantrums directly, a-kickin' and a-yellin' like a madwoman," was the general opinion among a laughing knot of police-officers whose experience had taught them what to expect; and they took occasional peeps at her, by means of their lanterns, through the iron-barred aperture in the door of the cell.

But she lay still for so long, that they grew almost discontented. The very gurgling and moaning had ceased. Nothing was to be heard but the scratching of the sergeant's pen upon paper, as he sat at his desk, and the shuffling of the feet of the attendant constables in "reserve."

"I don't half like this," said the sergeant, at last, summoning one of the reserve; "I'd sooner by half she made a rumpus. Just go, Mazy, and see what's come to her. Perhaps she's hung herself."

But she hadn't hung herself; she didn't move nor breathe, that the constable could discover; and she was reported to be getting quite cold and stiff.

"You'd better go for the doctor, Mazy," remarked the sergeant resignedly.

The doctor came, and soon departed. He was of no use, he said, as the woman had been dead some time.

Of course there was an inquest. Dr. Walker, divisional surgeon, deposed that he was sent for to examine the deceased woman, and found that she was quite dead, and must have been dead an hour or two. She died of effusion of serum on the brain; and this was caused by want and exposure.

"Had she been drinking?" asked a jurymen.

"Certainly not, poor thing," replied the doctor.

"Did you smell rum?" asked another jurymen.

"Did the woman smell of rum, do you mean?" inquired the doctor, with a curious smile.

"Yes, of course."

"No, she did not."

"Did anybody smell of rum?"

"Well, there certainly was a smell of rum pervading the cell when I was first shown in, but from whom or from where it came, I couldn't state positively."

The jury found a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence as to the cause of death; and they expressed an opinion that, though in a general way it is advisable not to take for dead drunk everybody who falls down insensible in the streets and not to defer sending for medical attendance until it is too late, yet, in the particular case, there had clearly been a mysterious but strong smell of rum about, and considerable cause for the belief which had been adopted.

Meanwhile Mr. Triggs, who did not read police-cases and inquests and the like, wouldn't, if he had read them, have recognised Mary in the "woman unknown," whose sad fate was made public; for he was unacquainted even with the name of the street in which he had been accosted by her, and had frequently anathematised her for not revealing Bent's whereabouts, which he was convinced she knew quite well.

"*She* knew, for all her actin'," he said to himself; "and I'd have made it well worth her while to let me know where I could lay hands on the villain; it's her own fault and infernal obstinacy if she does starve, as she said. I shouldn't wonder if *she* turns up yet: people generally do when they're starving."

CHAPTER XXVI.

SOMETHING MAY HAPPEN IN SIX MONTHS.

MR. PRITT was as good as his word : he threw physic to the dogs, he sent his doctor, figuratively, to Bath, and dined with his company. It was a great day for the Flounderers. They are not, as has been said, a large company, but, what with liverymen and their friends, they made a very good show, both in number and appearance, at the great livery dinner. In appearance, especially, they, or many of them, displayed unmistakable signs about the nose and face generally of being persons addicted to all manner of "refreshments." The Flounderers had a nice little hall, which they boasted of as a work attributed to Inigo Jones, who they, or at least some of them, believed came over with William the Conqueror and had a hand in the erection of Westminster Abbey ; they had silver plate, whereof the quantity would have brought tears of envy to a burglar's eyes and the water of longing to a burglar's mouth, and whereof the date and style would have put burglarious ideas into the mind of the most upright antiquary ; they had a beadle who was a corporation in himself ; and they had their own coat-of-arms. This coat-of-arms fluttered upon banners, glittered upon windows and walls, and was conspicuously printed upon cards of invitation. It had the historic and civic dagger in one corner ; it was surmounted by a scroll bearing the well-known motto from the Roman satirist, "*Damnose bibimus*," and, as if with reference to the probable consequences, it bore underneath, the significant phrase : "*Domine dirige nos*."

This work of heraldic art blazed conspicuously upon the canopy under which sat Mr. Pritt in all his glory. He was seated in a very high-backed chair, upon a sort of dais, and the Breeches-maker sat beside him. Both he and the august Breeches-maker, by virtue of their Mastership, wore round their necks a broad riband from which dangled a bauble, set in gold, and flashing, as it seemed, with precious stones.

A few paces to Mr. Pritt's right rear stood, or rather swayed (for he had dined, and his allowance of wine on such occasions was liberal), the portly beadle, who, grasping with his right hand a staff, which might have served for Goliath's spear, was in attendance upon the Worshipful Master. At the top of the staff was a huge ornament, apparently of massive silver, and, as the beadle swayed about, the use, if not the meaning, of the high back to the chair in which the Worshipful Master always sat became apparent; for, had it not been for the high back, the heavy ornament at the top of the staff must have inevitably descended several times upon the Worshipful Master's unprotected crown. But Mr. Pritt was happily unconscious of his peril, or perhaps knew of old the security afforded by the high back.

At any rate, he wore a beaming face, and was not at all disconcerted, as some inexperienced persons might have been, at the occasional snore or snort with which the well-dined beadle suddenly, at intervals, woke up to a fuller sense of his duty of standing quite still, looking perfectly vacant, and wheezing audibly. Only once was that beaming face of Mr. Pritt's overclouded: He prided himself upon doing the honours of his position thoroughly and with strict impartiality towards all his brother-liverymen, to the very meanest of whom a waiter was sure to come at some part of the dinner with the gratifying announcement:

"The Master will take wine with you and your friend, sir—champagne."

In responding to one of these invitations, a certain liveryman, who was of no standing, but by sitting at an extra side-table was brought within speaking distance of Mr. Pritt, thought the opportunity of exchanging a few words with the

great man too good to be lost, and consequently, not content with a mere bow and smile, added :

"Glad to see you here again, and looking so well, master."

"Thankee," said Mr. Pritt laconically.

"You look quite hearty *now*," observed the liveryman jovially; "different to what you did *afore* dinner. You looked as if you ought to be a-bed;" and he returned with a laugh to the contents of his plate.

Mr. Pritt was evidently much annoyed; a deeper flush came over his already high-coloured face, and he did not quite recover himself until the dessert came on. He was then in his element, for he was proud of his public speaking; and he certainly did not speak at all badly, though he spoke bad English. He had a very good voice, which he could manage, when he pleased, so as to harmonise with every variety of feeling; he could make his audience laugh and almost cry by his mere tone, expression, and manner; moreover, he was a venerable-looking old man, he could assume a rather deceitfully-benevolent air, and his style of speaking and gesticulating was unquestionably impressive, though pompous. He had no sooner taken his sceptre, or ivory hammer, in hand, and proposed, in his very best and stateliest terms, "The Queen of Queens, the Queen of England, and Empress of the Indies," than he felt quite young again, and regularly punished the rare old port he had ordered for his friend the Breeches-maker. He was immensely successful in the speech in which he proposed the "Great City Companies," coupling it with the name of his "honourable" friend (for he was an M.P.) the Breeches-maker. The Breeches-maker rose to return thanks, and the eyes of all the liverymen and their guests devoured him. There was a dead silence when each liveryman had just remarked to his neighbour, in a tone of awe: "He's the Master o' the Breeches-makers, and a M.P." The Breeches-maker looked patronisingly and complacently around, as a seasoned old ogre might regard a gathering of well-gorged imps, and, fumbling at his bauble of office, thus began :

"MASTER AND GENTLEMEN,—I'm very much obliged to you,

sir, for the terms in which you've spoke of the Great Comp'nies, and for the honour you've done me in calling upon me to respond; and to you, gentlemen, for the manner in which you drank the toast proposed by your Master. Don't suppose, gentlemen, that, because you're a small Comp'ny, we don't know of yer and respect yer. We've heard of yer, and we take an interest in yer; the echo of your festivities, so to speak, has penetrated into all parts of this great city, and we're proud to think that you worthily sustain that city's reputation for 'ospitality. We don't think small beer of yer; we're aware there's not much of that tap drunk in this hall. There are many gentlemen among you, whether holding office"—and here he turned towards the Worshipful Master, but caught the eye of the Beadle, who bowed profoundly, somewhat disconcerting the speaker—"there are many gentlemen," he repeated, after scowling at the Beadle, "whether holding office or not, of whom any Comp'ny might be proud. There's my excellent friend, your Worshipful Master, whom we should consider an acquisition to ourselves; and we have royalty on *our* livery. There are your auditors, whom I have the pleasure of knowing in the way of business; and there's your Chaplain, who, as I understand, took 'igh honours at the university, and has never missed a single dinner, discharging his sacred functions with unflaggin' energy, from the time that he was first elected to his important office, nearly a quarter of a century ago. As for your Warden, no words of mine could do full justice to the character he bears as a man and a hosier; and to the qualities of your Renter-warden, to whose care we are indebted for the splendid banquet which is still proceeding, our interiors must, I am sure, bear ample and grateful testimony. In conclusion, gentlemen, when I gaze upon your elegant hall, designed, as I believe, by the famous architect who built that celebrated banqueting-hall for an English monarch; when I reflect upon the treasures you possess in your collection of costly and ancient plate; when I suffer my imagination to run riot among the good cheer under which this table is continually groanin'; when I consider what encouragement you must give to the wine-growing industries

of France, and Spain, and Portugal, and Germany; and, above all, when I see around me so many gentlemen of wealth and substance, I feel inclined to borrow an expression attributed to Alexander the Great, in a friendly chat with the Scenic philosopher—him that lived in a tub, you know. Alexander, you recollect, said that, if he hadn't happened to ha' been who he was, he'd ha' been proud and 'appy to ha' been What's-his-name—the Scenic, you know. Well, so *I* say—though *you* don't live in a tub, far from it—that, if I were not a Breeches-maker, I would be a Flounderer."

The Breeches-maker's condescending speech was received with vociferous applause; and was appropriately followed by the song,

Where the bee sucks, there lurk I;
In a cowslip's bell I lie.

Shortly afterwards the Breeches-maker, as became so august a personage, withdrew, having performed the duty, for which he knew he had been invited, of parading himself before the admiring Flounderers. He had excused himself to Mr. Pritt, saying with a smile:

"You know I have to be very careful; I wish you well through your evening, my friend; I'm a Worshipful Master myself, and I know what heavy work you've got before you: especially if you set a proper example."

Mr. Pritt did set a proper example: he went faithfully through the list of toasts, neither cutting his speeches short nor failing to stimulate his vigour and his eloquence with wine. At length the toasts were all finished, and the feasters, or such of them as had not already filed out, rose and left the hall in a body, seeking coffee and cigars. Mr. Pritt remained sitting in the high-backed chair. He had risen up and so given the signal for general movement, but he had sunk back again and appeared to be dozing. Some of his more immediate neighbours, who had been conversing with him, and were preparing to give him respectful precedence on the way out, observed his singular proceedings, and were just exchanging

significant grins, when he fell forward with a groan on to the table. They were still grinning as they ran to his assistance, but the expression of his face, all purple and swollen; and his stertorous breathing, sobered and alarmed them. Triggs was amongst them, and with characteristic coolness and decision ordered Mr. Pritt to be carried down at once to his carriage which was waiting, whilst the old gentleman's neckerchief was loosened on the way.

"We can take him to Dr. Pritchett's as soon as a doctor could be got here," said Triggs.

So he was driven to the house of Dr. Pritchett, who was at home, and who, seeing the whole case at a glance, jumped into the carriage, taking with him such means of temporary treatment as he needed, and accompanied the old gentleman to Notting Hill, where he was at once put to bed, after the usual restoratives had been tried.

"Apoplexy, of course, doctor," said Triggs coolly, but in a low voice.

The doctor nodded.

"Any chance?" asked Triggs.

"You'd better send at once for his daughter," was the doctor's evasive reply.

"I'll go myself," said Triggs, and at once did as he had said.

As quickly as it was possible, Triggs returned with Marietta, who had, on the road, been prepared for everything by Triggs. She bowed in silence to Doctor Pritchett, and, walking up to the bedside where Mrs. Joyce was installed, she said in an imperious whisper:

"I'll just take off my things, and then relieve you here."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Mrs. Joyce, but with a look of anything but thankfulness.

"Has my father spoken at all?" asked Marietta when she had taken up her post.

Mrs. Joyce looked at Dr. Pritchett, as if she expected him to answer.

"He has not said anything coherent," replied the doctor.

"I heard him distinctly say 'cod,' several times over,"

added Mrs. Joyce; "and I heard him say 'will,' I'm sure; and fancy he mentioned a person's name. 'Cod' seems as if his mind was still on the dinner, poor gentleman," added Mrs. Joyce.

"If you are right," observed the doctor thoughtfully, "it is most likely that he wants to add a codicil to his will in favour of somebody."

"So I think," assented Marietta, with a significant glance at Triggs.

"Anyhow," rejoined the doctor, "he is utterly incapable of doing anything of the kind just now."

Mrs. Joyce was full of concern at this announcement, saying:

"Poor gentleman, perhaps it was somebody of whom he was very fond, and to whom it will make a great difference."

Mr. and Mrs. Triggs seemed less concerned than Mrs. Joyce, but Mrs. Triggs asked meditatively:

"Could you make out what name was mentioned, Mrs. Joyce?"

"It seemed to me, ma'am, that he mentioned more names than one," simpered Mrs. Joyce. "I shouldn't like to say any that I wasn't pretty sure of, but I'm pretty sure he said 'Mrs.' Somebody, and something that sounded like 'choice,' and afterwards 'parson,' or 'Farson.'"

Mr. and Mrs. Triggs exchanged glances.

"Do you know any Mrs. Farson?" the doctor asked Marietta.

"No," said Marietta decidedly.

"There's old Mrs. Farquharson," said the doctor thoughtfully: "but I can't suppose it was she."

"Perhaps the 'Mrs.' applied to somebody, and the 'Farson' to somebody else," suggested Mrs. Joyce ingenuously; "he didn't say them together, there was a pause between the two, and the word 'choice' seemed as if he preferred one to the other."

"Hu-u-sh!" whispered Marietta, as her father began to mumble audibly.

The doctor approached the bedside, opposite Marietta, and

listened attentively. Presently, the sick man ceased mumbling, sighed heavily, and then lay perfectly still. The doctor remained a minute or two attentively scanning and manipulating the motionless form, after which he said quietly to Marietta :

"It matters little what the name was; he'll never speak again."

Marietta buried her head in the bedclothes, shuddering.

Triggs went up to the dead man's pillow; took one long, steadfast look at the familiar face, and then sat down by the fireside, gazing thoughtfully into the glowing cavern in the middle of the burning coals.

Mrs. Joyce had at once covered the dead face with the sheet, and now accosted the departing doctor, as she opened the door for him to pass out :

"Did you make out any name?" she asked with a sob.

"Yes," replied the doctor kindly, "he certainly did mention the name of Farson or Farquharson, but he said Miss, not Mrs. : *that* I'm quite sure of;" and he went his way.

Poor Mrs. Joyce sank down into an arm-chair and wept; and as she wept she attracted the attention of Triggs, over whose face passed a peculiar expression, such as might have been produced, had he been acquainted with Greek, by a reminiscence of what Homer has recorded :

*ἐπὶ δὲ στενάχοντο γυναῖκες,
Πάτροκλον πρόφασιν, σφῶνδ' αὐτῶν κήδε' ἐκάστη.*

CHAPTER XXVII.

DIVIDING THE SPOIL.

"AND Lara sleeps not where his fathers sleep," wrote the poet. A similar remark might be applied to the late George Pritt, Esquire. In fact, nobody knows where Mr. Pritt's fathers do sleep, or whether he ever had any father (to speak of), let alone fathers. However, he sleeps in what he would no doubt have considered a far better place, as being "better value for money." The "family vault of George Pritt, Esquire," was worthy of containing the bones of an emperor, and capacious enough for a race of giants. What marble could do towards making him rest in peace was faithfully done; and an elaborately-graven inscription recorded the date of his birth and of his death, and added his age, as if the beholder's power of arithmetic would be unequal to the task of unassisted calculation. The inscription also bore witness to his position as a "citizen and Flounderer," and had appended to it a scriptural quotation, which seemed to have rather an ironical bearing upon his case, for it ran: "Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt."

His funeral had been a good thing for the undertakers; and, if the departed spirit be conscious of the obsequies with which its late tenement is committed to the tomb, must have been vehemently protested against on the score of unnecessary expense.

For Mr. Pritt, to do him justice, would have felt more

honoured in the breach than the observance of any respectful attentions incompatible with economy. He would have been pleased at the notion of Mrs. Farquharson's compounding for a drive by sending her hired brougham to follow the procession; but he would have strongly objected to the senseless extravagance of the man who walked in front with a tray full of black plumes, the main object of which appeared to be to set nervous horses shying, and so to promote the probability of more funerals at an early date.

Mr. Triggs had done his best to have matters arranged after a manner more in accordance with what he knew would have been the wish of Mr. Pritt; but he had been, for once in his life, prevailed upon to let others have their own way, and had bowed, not over-graciously, to the wishes of Captain Davies and Lurline, who had arrived from abroad in time to take part in the funeral arrangements.

Mr. Pritt's will created some astonishment as well as discontent and curiosity. He had made it some time previously to, but in view of, Lurline's marriage, and he had informed her and Captain Davies of its contents only just so far as it pleased him to vouchsafe them information; she knew, however, that she and her husband were to have the house with the portico at Notting Hill.

And so it turned out. In fact he left house, furniture, plate, jewels, etc., to Lurline; and to Marietta he left a mere legacy of five thousand pounds. But then he left all the interest in his business, together with capital for the working of it, to Triggs and Marietta jointly, with such conditions as were equitable.

But what chiefly amazed those interested in the will was that the testator had left a year's wages to all the hands in his employment at the date of his death, and to all the domestic servants in his household at the same date, besides handsome legacies, ranging from ten thousand pounds to five hundred, to about a score of public charities. He had, however, explained his reasons, saying:

"I never gave away anything to speak of in my lifetime, either publicly or privately, not because I grudged it, but

because, when you once begin that sort of thing and get a name for being charitable, people have no mercy upon you. Begging letters, visitors, impostors, secretaries of societies, take up all your time; you are asked to be here, there, and everywhere, presiding at dinners or at meetings, and your business may go to rack and ruin, for you can't attend to it; and ten to one you get a name for only wanting to be talked about and flattered in the papers, and perhaps to attract so much notice as to have a baronetcy or some rubbish of that sort offered to you. I never did believe that I was bound to be my brother's keeper, and to open my purse to everybody and anybody who happened to want what I had in it, but I always did and do believe that every man whose business has prospered, is bound to do something to relieve the general misery of his country, and so I have left a great part of my personal property to the institutions that seemed to me the most likely to do good. If I have been wrong in leaving my charities until my death, may God forgive me!

"To my dear daughter, Lurline," the will concluded, "I leave the residue of my personalty, and I calculate that, with what I settled upon her and her husband at her marriage, it will make up the very handsome provision of ten thousand pounds a year." And, by one of those oversights or curious freaks which the very keenest men of business display sometimes, he had omitted, either in the settlement or the will, to "tie up" the property in any way whatever.

It had evidently been the testator's intention to add a codicil to his will, for the commencement of one had been found unfinished:

"To show my regard for Charlotte Farquharson, eldest daughter of Mrs. Farquharson of—, I revoke—" it began, and then it suddenly stopped, as if the writer had determined to put off the completion to another time.

The comments of those who were chiefly concerned in the will had been very characteristic.

"Papa had a perfect right to do as he pleased with his own," said Marietta proudly to Triggs, when they talked the matter over together: "and I'm not at all sorry that he left

all he has to Lurline. He seems to me to have shown his confidence in you, Tom; that you could make a fortune as well as he could himself, and that you could take care of your own wife. And for my part, I'm glad that he has left all those charitable legacies. I like to know that my father had a more generous heart than people gave him credit for," she added with glistening eyes.

"There's only one thing I object to particularly," observed Mr. Triggs gloomily; "you are the eldest daughter, and you ought to have had that house. I'd set my heart on the house: it's part of the double event; and I mean to win it too."

"What double event, Tom?" asked Mrs. Triggs quietly.

"Ah! you don't know of course," rejoined Mr. Triggs coolly; "but, mark my words, I'll win it yet."

Mrs. Triggs looked at him inquiringly; but he said no more: he merely nodded emphatically and left the room, going to consult Mrs. Joyce as to whether she should be considered as a domestic servant and so entitled to a legacy, a question which he put in such a fashion as to cause Mrs. Joyce a severe struggle.

"Did you ever hear of anything so infamous?" Lurline had asked her husband, whilst her eyes flashed with indignation.

"Infamous, Lurley!" Captain Davies rejoined with frank surprise; "I think the old gentleman has behaved rather handsomely, do you know."

"Do you really, you poor, contented goose!" sneered Lurline; "a paltry ten thousand a year! He *could* have left us twenty."

"Hang it, Lurley," replied the Captain, a little nettled, "it's not a bad allowance; we shall manage to make both ends meet, and it's about five times as much as your sister will have for some years to come, I should say."

"She's a warehouseman's wife," said Lurline superciliously; "and," she added bitterly, "perhaps she was wise to marry a warehouseman. He'll not think much of ten thousand a year, as the utmost he can ever hope for," she concluded significantly.

Captain Davies frowned and was silent.

"And to leave all that money to those societies, rolling in

wealth as, of course, they are!" resumed Lurline vehemently; "I call it wicked. There's one providential thing, however: that that codicil was not finished; we should have been beggars."

"Lor', Lurley!" exclaimed the Captain, with an air of much interest, "you don't suppose he would have done anything for the Farquharson girl at *our* expense. I can't think that of the old gentleman; I rather fancy he was going to revoke some of those charitable legacies, do you know."

"Those charitable legacies, as you call them," observed Lurline, with an air of disgust, "make me feel quite sick; don't mention them! I've a great mind to dispute the will; I'm sure papa couldn't have been in his right mind."

"I say, Lurley," observed the Captain, with much anxiety, "I couldn't be a party to anything of that sort; a bird in the hand, you know, eh? I should say it would come out that the old gentleman was as right as the mail so far as money was concerned."

"I'm afraid—you're—right," assented Lurline reluctantly. "I'm going upstairs to look over poor papa's things."

In a short time she came back radiant.

"What *do* you think I've found!" she cried. "Oh, do look at these beauties!"

And she opened to view a large jewel-case, exposing to view a diamond necklace, earrings, and other ornaments.

"Why, that must be worth a small fortune!" exclaimed Captain Davies.

"Another providential thing!" exclaimed Lurline, laughing gaily.

"Eh?" remarked the Captain inquiringly.

"Why, don't you see, you dear old silly," said Lurline, putting her arms round the Captain's neck to impress her remarks, "this was evidently intended as a wedding-present for *somebody else*; and now it's mine—mine—mine!" And she kissed the diamonds thrice in exultation.

Her husband watched her anxiously and silently as she deliberately put them on.

"There!" she cried triumphantly; "aren't they becoming?"

"You look glorious in them, Lurley," assented the Captain admiringly; "but I say, Lurley," he added, a little nervously.

"Well!" replied Lurline dryly.

"I was going to say," he resumed, a little uneasily, "that, as your father evidently intended to mention Miss Farquharson in his will, and as you have told me he had some notion of making her his wife, and as you seem to think that these diamonds were meant to be a wedding-present, it would be carrying out your father's wishes to—to—you know—to let the present go where it would have gone—there!"

Lurline had been regarding him fixedly, with a more and more icy expression, and with a look of greater and greater contempt, until he finished; and then she flew out with the emphatic words:

"You're a fool!"

"Lurline," said he gravely, whilst his face grew deadly pale, his lip quivered, and his eye flashed dangerously, "you have spoken to me like that before; I beg that you will never do it again. I made a suggestion to you; if you prefer not to adopt it, I have no more to say; but when you differ from me for the future, keep a guard on your tongue."

She sat and pouted, he sat and frowned. Suddenly she jumped up, placed herself on his knee, put her arms round his neck, and spoke to him in low, coaxing tones:

"Listen to me, darling. Didn't I tell you it was a wedding-present? It would be absurd to give such a thing to anybody but a bride; and I am still a bride, you know."

"I really think Miss Farquharson ought to know that your father did not forget her, and that she ought to be asked to accept some handsome souvenir of his regard," said the Captain, softening.

"And so she shall, dear—both," assented Lurline, sealing her promise with a kiss.

Whereupon the completely mollified Captain observed heartily:

"Thank you, Lurley; you are a trump."

And so, when the Misses Farquharson paid their visit

of condolence, Lurline took occasion to show Miss Farquharson, with quite sisterly tenderness, the unfinished record of old Mr. Pritt's affectionate remembrance.

Miss Farquharson was much moved; but what particular feeling it was that overpowered her it would be rash to predicate. She read the few words, turned as white as a leper, glared fiercely at Lurline, and then burst into tears.

Lurline sat down by her side, took one of her hands, and talked to her in gentle, soothing, sympathetic tones :

"You know, dear, we can't possibly guess what papa's intentions were, or I'm sure an effort would be made to carry them out, although the lawyer says there's absolutely nothing to be done. Papa has not behaved so liberally to Marietta and to me as we had reason to expect, and he can hardly have intended to diminish our paltry shares. Nor can we suppose that he would have revoked the legacies he left to the warehouse people and to the household servants. The only thing we can think of is the legacies to those nasty charities, rolling in money; and if we were to attempt to meddle with *them*, we *should* have a nest of hornets and a swarm of lawyers about our ears. Besides, it is utterly out of the question to think of such a thing, the lawyer says."

Miss Farquharson had by this time recovered herself.

"Excuse me, dear," she gasped with a sickly smile, "for being so foolish; I was quite overcome by your poor father's proof of his regard. There is nothing to be done, of course," she added with a sigh.

"What pains me," said Lurline, looking the picture of affectionate contrition, "is to think that, if we had come home a little sooner from abroad, all this might never have happened."

"How so?" asked Miss Farquharson a little sternly.

"Ah!" replied Lurline, with a smile of mingled archness and sadness, "I knew papa's secrets, and I am pretty sure that, if we had come home a few weeks sooner, that horrid codicil would either have been completed or never begun. You know, we were expected home very soon, every week I may say; and my opinion is that papa began to get fidgety

and nervous, and couldn't quite make up his mind to add a codicil when he might soon"—and here she looked significantly at Miss Farquharson—"have to make another will altogether."

"Make another will altogether!" exclaimed Miss Farquharson with an air of surprise.

"Yes, dear," rejoined Lurline demurely; "every time you marry, you have to make a new will; or, at any rate, any will you may have already made is worth no more than—that unfinished codicil."

"I am quite aware of that," assented Miss Farquharson loftily; "but——"

"Oh, but me no buts!" Lurline broke in saucily; "didn't I tell you I knew papa's secrets?"

"Then you know a great deal more than I do," answered Miss Farquharson, colouring deeply.

"No doubt, dear, no doubt," said Lurline with a queer intonation; "but now, let me ask you a favour. We should so much like to give you something that belonged to papa in memory of him. Will you accept it?"

"Certainly, dear," replied Miss Farquharson with much dignity; "I shall lay great store by anything you think proper to let me have in remembrance of my kind old friend."

"Very well, then," said Lurline cheerfully, "I shall look out something that papa valued very highly, and send it round to your house."

"Thank you, dear!" said Miss Farquharson with a sigh, not of dissatisfaction, for to the best of her experience Mr. Pritt valued nothing very highly that did not cost a heap of money.

The two ladies then rejoined Caroline Farquharson, who had been left to her own devices in the drawing-room, and who, on their return, cried:

"Oh, Lottie, do come and look at this magnificent Bible!"

"Very fine indeed!" assented Miss Farquharson, glancing carelessly over a few leaves of a gigantic volume bound in or covered with purple velvet, with large gilt clasps and a profusion of noble illustrations; "I don't think I ever saw it before."

"No," said Lurline; "it used to be in papa's study; he very seldom opened it, but I know from what he has said, that he valued it very highly."

Lurline pronounced the last words a little emphatically, but the emphasis was lost upon Miss Farquharson, who took an affectionate leave and departed in company with her sister.

On the evening of that very day Captain Davies asked his wife:

"Did you find anything for poor Miss Farquharson, Lurley?"

"Yes, dear, I did," answered Lurline gravely.

"What was it, darling?"

"A pearl of great price, dear."

Something in the words or the tone made the Captain look curiously at Lurline, but he merely inquired:

"Was it a very big one, Lurley?"

"Oh, a perfect monster!" replied Lurline. "Johnson, the huge footman, quite staggered under the weight of it."

"Come, I say, Lurley," remarked the Captain, smiling, "I know what a pearl is, you know; you haven't been going to the other extreme and sending all the plate and jewels in a chest, have you?"

"You dear, silly old gander," rejoined Lurline; "do you think you have married an equally silly goose?"

"But what was it, Lurley?"

"Never—you—mind; if you can't guess what the pearl of great price is, you are a—heathen."

The Captain looked wistfully at Lurline, and shook his head mournfully.

"Give it up," said he.

But Lurline left the room without enlightening him.

About the same time, the same evening, there had been a scene at Mrs. Farquharson's. The old lady and her two daughters, the elder of whom had told her pitiful story, had been debating as to what form the souvenir, which was to come from Lurline, would take. And Mrs. Farquharson had expressed herself thus:

"I think I know what it will be. The poor old man showed me a most splendid suite of diamonds, my dears, enough to make one's eyes quite dazzle to look at them, and he asked me how I thought they would suit a bride. Of course I knew what he meant, but he told me to say nothing about them until I saw them actually worn—and I have never

said a word until now. Depend upon it they were marked out as intended for Charlotte (perhaps her name was put on the case), and they will be sent to her. La! What a knock!"

There *was* a knock worthy of the huge footman, Johnson; and, in due time, two of Mrs. Farquharson's maids staggered in with:

"A parcel, please, ma'am, from Mrs. Davies."

"For me?" asked Miss Farquharson coolly.

"Yes, miss."

"Then you can leave it."

"Whatever can it be?" was the exclamation of mother and daughters.

Miss Farquharson opened it, and—was speechless. She stared at the contents, and then sank down upon a sofa and covered her face with a pocket-handkerchief.

Caroline Farquharson advanced to the parcel as if it had been alive and possibly vicious, and—burst out laughing.

"What is it, girls?" screamed Mrs. Farquharson from her pillows, in her easy-chair.

"A most—magnificent—Bible, mamma," said Caroline, with another burst of laughter.

"A what! A Bible!" shrieked Mrs. Farquharson; "why it's disgraceful! The impertinent little hussy!"

"And here's an inscription," continued Caroline, reading out:

"'To Charlotte Farquharson, in token of the warm regard with which she inspired a *very old* friend.—L. D.'"

"She has scored under '*very old*,'" continued Caroline, tittering, "as if she meant something more than the words necessarily imply."

"The spiteful, insolent, *wicked* little wretch!" moaned Mrs. Farquharson.

Miss Farquharson took a bedroom-candle and retired to the solitude of her own chamber.

Soon afterwards the Farquharsons left town and went to reside in the country.

They did not take leave of Captain and Mrs. Davies.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN ATTORNEY AMONG THE CLASSICS.

ONE, two, three, four, five years went by, and the sixth year was well advanced.

Triggs and Marietta had one little girl: Captain and Mrs. Davies had no child. People remarked what a pity it was; for the Captain and his lovely wife, they said, were making the old gentleman's money fly, and Mrs. Davies was attracting a great deal of attention by her flirtations at private balls and public balls, at home and abroad, on the promenade and in the saloons of Monte Carlo. Captain Davies, who had gone on half-pay, was looking, it was remarked, haggard and worn and unhappy, and, though he was assiduous in his attentions to his wife, was treated by her with exasperating coolness and gay neglect. She had even got "talked about" in connection with a gigantic cavalry-officer, a man of great wealth, an Honourable Major Shorthose, who had been well known to and had served with Captain Davies in the Crimea. If Mrs. Davies, it was commonly observed, were to have a little son or daughter, it might and probably would alter her mode of life altogether, and perhaps restore complete harmony to the domestic bells that seemed to be jangled and out of tune. But the little son or daughter delayed their coming, if they were to come at all.

All society just now was preparing for Ascot races.

The Ascot meeting, as everybody knows, takes place early in June, just when the country is most charming, and just

when the London season is, with the usual contradiction of life, at its height. The Ascot Summer Meeting is meant, of course; for the Spring Meeting occurs only in a fitful, tentative manner, and doesn't count.

On a lovely June evening, then, the Monday before the commencement of the doings at Royal Ascot, just such an evening as that on which we first saw Mr. Triggs paying a visit in the same locality, he wended his way to "a crooked lane not far from St. Paul's, and ascended a staircase which loomed through a beetling, gloomy, arched doorway." But he did not knock at the door whereon was inscribed, "Mr. Dan Tribe;" for, held by the knocker, was a sheet, or half-sheet, of blue paper, and on it was written in very large letters, "Gone to Bill's Coffee House, Temple Bar."

Mr. Triggs grunted out his discontent, but lost no time in proceeding to Temple Bar, where he had little difficulty in finding "Bill's." He walked into the coffee-room, inquired after Mr. Dan Tribe, and was requested to wait a minute. The waiter who made the request tripped up a winding staircase and very soon returned with the desired Dan, who, catching sight of Triggs, said with an air of surprise rather than of pleasure:

"Why, it's Mr. Triggs! So help me—I beg pardon, I fancied I was in court."

"I want you, Dan, very particular," replied Triggs, just putting his fingers to Mr. Tribe's proffered hand.

Mr. Tribe looked vexed.

"Come upstairs for half an hour," he said; "I can introduce a stranger."

"What the deuce is it?" asked Triggs discontentedly.

"It's a little literary club I belong to," replied Dan rather sheepishly, as he led the way up the winding staircase.

Triggs followed with anything but a good grace, and was ushered into a long low room, where about a dozen men of as many sorts, sizes, ages, and physiognomies were seated round a green-baize-covered table, on which pipes, cigars, tumblers full of cold punch, and tankards full of beer mingled with journals, periodicals, pens, ink, and paper. The windows

were all as wide open as they could be thrown, and, looking as they did upon some of the trees and courts of the Temple, gave a glimpse of an outside a little more in harmony than the inside with the beauties of a still and sultry evening in June. Mr. Triggs, having bowed to the present members of the "Lyric Club," sat down and manfully smoked a long clay, moistened with a tumbler of cold punch. His entrance had hardly disturbed for a second the animated discussion which had been going on, and into which Dan Tribe was immediately drawn by a personal appeal:

"What do *you* say, Dan?"

"I say," answered he, "that it is the most difficult thing in the world to give the palm to any particular translator. Of the more modern translators, you may take Conington and Theodore Martin and compare them together. A scholar, who knows his Horace in the original, will not hesitate to put Theodore Martin a hundred miles behind Conington; but I venture to say that a man who knew no Latin would either find them both utterly unreadable, or would give the preference to Theodore Martin. And the question is whether the more successful translator is not the man who, never mind at what cost to the original, turns out that which is the more intelligible, the more agreeable, and the more congenial to his countrymen. At the same time, it is inconceivable to me how a man, credited as Theodore Martin is with a musical ear and with at least as much knowledge of vocal sounds as a boy on one of the lowest forms in a Cockney school may be supposed to possess, could ever have reconciled himself to not only writing but having printed and published so vile, execrable, and damnatory a rhyme as that in the first two lines of the ode to the Bandusian fount:

Fountain of Bandusia,
Sparkling brightly in thy play.

"Why it is a rhyme which would be hardly pardonable in a burlesque at the Strand Theatre."

"That's your ode, you know, Dan," broke in a voice; "take care what you say."

"I know it is," rejoined Dan quietly; "but whatever I may have done, I have done nothing so atrocious as that."

"Besides," remarked a supercilious man, in a tone of authority, "it is exactly what Tennyson himself has done in the 'Beggar Maid,' you know :

" Her hands across her breast she laid ;
She was more fair than words can say ;
Bare-footed came the beggar-maid
Before the King Cophetua.

How about Tennyson, Dan ? "

"Homer nods sometimes," replied Dan with a smile; "and Tennyson sometimes, under stress of rhyme, seems to lose his ear. Tennyson, moreover, is something more than a mere versifier, and may be allowed liberties. Then, again, he is writing simple English, and may be pardoned for using a cockneyism; but a man who is translating a Roman's ode is not at liberty, if he adopts the Roman's own word, whether proper name or not, to misrepresent the Roman to the extent of an impossible sound."

"Well, come, read out your version, Dan," said another voice; and, "Yes, yes, it's time to read now," roared many voices in chorus.

"I'd rather somebody else read it," said Dan modestly; "will you be kind enough to read it, sir?" and he turned to a gentleman, who, by his dress, was unmistakably a clergyman.

The clergyman took the proffered paper, read it carefully to himself first, and then, his face glowing and his eyes glistening with evident surprise and satisfaction, read out in a fine voice and with wonderful appreciation :

"Fountain, of Bandusia hight,
More than glassy mirror bright,
Worthy of the sweets we bring,
Wine we pour and flowers we fling,
Lo! to-morrow I will be
Donor of a kid to thee,
On whose forehead budding out
Little horns begin to sprout,
Tokens vain of idle dreams—
Deeds of love and warlike schemes—

For the little wanton's blood
 Red shall dye thine icy flood.
 Thee the Dog-star harmeth not,
 Though his rays be fever-hot;
 Weary ox and roving kine
 Know what cool delight is thine.
 Thou shalt have a place among
 Fountains that the bard hath sung;
 I will tell of oaks that grow
 On the hollow rocks below,
 Whence thy limpid waters leap
 All a-babble down the steep."

As soon as the reader had finished, he handed back the paper to Dan, saying:

"Thank you, sir; I think it is the best thing of the kind I ever saw: it keeps up the simple prettiness of the original, and there is not a single idea omitted: it is almost literal, without being bald."

"Bravo! Dan, bravo!" cried the general chorus of voices. Dan blushed and looked pleased.

Then came the little criticisms and hypercriticisms: one objected that the sixteen lines of the original had been spun out into two-and-twenty; another that "the sweets we bring" in the third line smacked of young children and toffee; another that, according to the original, it should have been "weary bulls" or "weary bull," instead of "weary ox" in the fifteenth line; another that there was no word in the original that justified the "steep" in the last line, appealing confidently to Mr. Triggs for his opinion.

"I'm no scholar; it's all Greek to me, and in my opinion it's a pack o' rubbish altogether," answered that gentleman bluntly, glaring at Dan, and looking significantly at his watch.

For Mr. Triggs had been fuming and fretting all through the session, and he now rose up angrily and rudely, crying:

"It's half-past nine, Dan; and I can't wait any longer. Evenin', gentlemen."

"Wait a minute, Mr. Triggs, I'm coming," said Dan, hurrying after him. "I was only just writing your name in the visiting-book. Now I'm at your service,"

"What's the meaning of all this tomfoolery, Dan?" asked Mr. Triggs, when they were fairly in a hansom, bowling away down towards St. Paul's.

"It means, Mr. Triggs," replied Dan with some dignity, as if he were hurt at the tone of the question, "that a certain number of scholars and gentlemen meet at what they call the 'Lyric Club,' and on certain nights read translations from the lyric poets of Greece and Rome, or, if they please, of France or Germany; or they may, if they prefer it, recite original verses—but they must be lyrics."

"Oh!" remarked Triggs dryly, "and what d'ye get for *that*?"

"We don't get anything *for* it, but we get a great deal of pleasure *from* it," answered Dan a little sulkily. "The nasty work *I* have to do, Mr. Triggs," he added significantly, "requires some antidote, and I find it in the classics."

"Is that the same thing as the bottle, Dan?" inquired Triggs gruffly.

"The two go very well together," replied Dan, colouring slightly.

"So I should say," observed Triggs dryly; "and I see you have parsons among you."

"The parson you saw was a visitor," rejoined Dan, "but he's often up there when he comes to town. By-the-way, I meant to tell you, he's the man who married Charlotte Farquharson."

"What's his name?"

"Well, *we* call him the 'crapulous curate,' because he was a curate when we first knew him; but his real name is Burrows, and he has a small living at Uppersheet, Beds."

"What's a 'crap'lous curate?' Anything like a 'perpetual curate?'" asked Triggs.

"Not at all," answered Dan, with a snigger; "but he's a rare good scholar, I can tell you."

"Poor devil!" said Triggs, with hearty contempt rather than compassion.

They had now arrived at Mr. Tribe's den, as he called it, and the conversation became more serious and business-like. A bundle of papers was produced by Mr. Tribe, and was

increased by the addition of two or three more documents which Mr. Triggs handed over with the remark :

"I've read 'em over, Dan, and they're all right. You'll have to go and get the Captin's signature to-morrow morning; that's why I was so partic'lar about seeing you to-day. He's goin' down to Askit to-morrow about noon, or at least to some place between Windsor and Askit; they've taken a house there, as if they couldn't get through their money fast enough without. I'm told you pay a pretty penny for a house there in the Askit week."

"I shall have the honour of making the Captain's personal acquaintance at last," rejoined Mr. Tribe with a curious smile; "I've known his name and his signature very well for some years, as you are aware, Mr. Triggs."

"Ah," replied Triggs carelessly, "it was you that told me all about him and his bettin' and borrowin' when I fust mentioned that Lurline Pritt was goin' to marry a swell in the cavalry."

"Many a little bit of paper of his has passed through my hands," said Mr. Tribe pensively; "and many a time he has seemed to be on the point of being sold up, but somehow he has always managed to weather the storm."

"He'll have to do all he knows this time," growled Mr. Triggs savagely. "He was very hard hit at Epsom, and, if he don't have a big slice o' luck at Askit, he'll be in a bad way. That's a large sum o' money you're to give him, Dan; and I needn't tell *you* not to let him finger it till he's signed the papers, and especially the bill o' sale."

"You may make yourself quite easy on that score, Mr. Triggs," said Mr. Tribe with a sneer; "whatever my personal feelings may be, I always do my duty to my clients."

"You've made a good bit o' money by me, Dan," rejoined Mr. Triggs, with an air of surprise and displeasure.

"So did Vespasian by the sewage, and *he* found it didn't stink," observed Mr. Tribe with a little laugh.

"I should rather think he did," rejoined Mr. Triggs coolly; "though I never heard of him afore. What was he?—contractor, I s'pose?"

"Oh yes," answered Mr. Tribe, with ill-concealed contempt; "he was a contractor on a very large scale; and he carried on business as a Roman emperor as well."

"Come, none of your gammon, Mr. Dan," said Triggs imperturbably; "it's my belief you're drunk again."

Mr. Tribe flushed angrily, but recovered himself and remarked quietly:

"On the contrary, I'm a peg too low, and I'm uncommonly thirsty. Let us have a glass of the good Rhine wine."

And he set glasses and a long-necked bottle on the table. Some bottles of seltzer-water he also laid out. Mr. Triggs took some hock and seltzer-water, but Mr. Tribe took hock alone, and gradually became hilarious.

"Here's to the double event, Mr. Triggs," he cried; "and pray how is Mrs. Triggs?"

"She's all right," answered Triggs gruffly.

"And the little girl—how is she?" inquired Mr. Tribe.

"And she's all right," replied Triggs, still more gruffly. And he scowled and pondered. After a while he broke out:

"Look here, Dan: I don't often talk of my domestic affairs to you or to anybody else; but ever since that little 'un was born, and especially since she's begun to talk, and ask questions, and gabble by the hour together, my wife's got to be quite different. She used to keep a pretty stiff upper lip, you know."

"My impression has certainly always been that Mrs. Triggs was not a lady to be associated with any ideas of *weak* woman," rejoined Tribe coldly.

Triggs gave a short laugh.

"Just so," he assented; "and now she's turned quite molly. She goes to church of a week-day sometimes, as well as of a Sunday. I've no partic'lar objection to that, if she doesn't want *me* to go: it looks respectable, there's that to be said for it; it's a good three-quarters per cent. extra to anybody. But then she's all for being kind to everybody, and takin' the part of her sister and brother-in-law. It was only this mornin' she asked me not to be hard on them. As if I hadn't lent 'em money cheaper than they could have got it anywhere else;

and if they spend it all and can't pay, why their securities must be forfeited; it's law and custom and justice too, and I can't help it. She never *used* to be so very fond of her sister; but the little gal has done it all, *I* believe; the child's quite mad about her aunt Lurley, as she calls her."

"A very fascinating person, Mrs. Davies," said Mr. Tribe dryly; "and very happily named Lurline or Lorelei."

"What d'ye mean?" asked Mr. Triggs curtly.

"Did you ever hear of Heine?" asked Mr. Tribe a little loftily, for his wine had taken effect upon him.

"I've heard of somebody with a name like that," answered Mr. Triggs impatiently; "a bill-discounter, wasn't he?"

"Not the Heine *I* mean; the Heine *I* mean was a poet," said Mr. Tribe with dignity.

Triggs laughed scornfully.

Mr. Tribe opened a desk, and, having taken from it a sheet of paper covered with writing, proceeded with the air of a lecturer:

"Pray lend me your ears for a minute or two, Mr. Triggs, I shall not detain you long. Lurline or Lorelei is but the name of a Siren; and (allow me to remark in a parenthesis that a Siren is a fabulous enchantress, whose singing draws whosoever hears it irresistibly in the direction of the sound) this is the way Heine, not the bill-discounter, but the poet, done into English by Dan Tribe, has treated the legend concerning her:

I know not what it presages
That I so sad should be,
A legend of bygone ages
For ever haunting me.
The air is cool, and it darkles,
And gently flows the Rhine,
The top of the mountain sparkles
In the eventide sunshine.
And lo! thereon a sitter,
A maiden wondrous fair;
Her golden trickeries glitter,
She combeth her golden hair.
A golden comb she plieth
And singeth a song thereby,
Wherein great marvel liveth
Of masterful melody.

It is woe to the skipper who hears it,
As he floats in his tiny skiff;
He heeds not the reef as he nears it,
He heeds but the voice from the cliff.

I trow the eddies clinging
Suck down both fisher and boat;
And so much with her singing
The Lorelei hath wrought

Yes, Mr. Triggs," continued Dan, shaking his head solemnly, "she *lures* people to shipwreck and destruction, as the first syllable in Lurline, if you pronounce it thus—Lure-line—might seem to denote. Have a care, sir, have a care, or she'll be one too many for all of us."

Mr. Triggs had sat staring fixedly all this time, and he now said sternly, as he laid his clenched hand upon the table:

"She'll not lure *me*; whatever she may do to *you*. Look here, Master Dan. You've had too much to drink already; so put that bottle away and promise me faithfully not to touch another drop. You'll be forgetting all about my business, or bungling it to-morrow, if you don't mind; and if you *do* make a mistake, by George, I'll——"

"Mr. Triggs," interrupted Dan with an air of great gravity and importance, "be so good as to mention a single instance in which I have ever neglected or misconducted your business or anybody else's except my own, of which I have made a devil of a mess very often. As for the bottle, I'll put it away, or rather I'll throw it into the fireplace—so—with pleasure, as you must have seen, when I turned it up, that there was no more to be squeezed out of it. And now, sir, if you please, as I said before, I'll trouble you for an instance in which you have ever had to complain——"

"There, there, Dan," interrupted Mr. Triggs, soothingly for *him*; "that'll do; I've always found you up to the mark."

"Thank you, sir, for that statement," rejoined Dan with a bow. "And I assure you that I have often been much drunker, very m—m—uch drunker, than I am now, on the eve of an important transaction. Sometimes I get drunk before the transaction, sometimes after, and sometimes in the middle

of it," he continued confidentially : "it depends a good deal on the nastiness of it. By-the-way," he suddenly remarked, as if his words had recalled something to his memory, "do you ever hear anything nowadays, Mr. Triggs, of old Mrs. Maggitt?"

Triggs scowled, and answered bitterly :

"Quite as much as I want to. My wife took one of her queer new fancies into her head about *her*; wanted her to come and be nurse to my little gal, and live with us altogether; and, when she wouldn't do that, wanted to settle a sum of money upon her as an annuity; and, what d'ye think? the old fool wouldn't take a penny."

"Lor! why?" asked Dan in apparent surprise, but with a curious grimace.

"She didn't give any reason," replied Triggs gruffly; "but now you get to bed, and sleep yourself sober. I'm going."

And he strode towards the door.

Dan, with marvellous activity and with more steadiness of gait than was to be expected under the circumstances, lighted his visitor to the door, and, just as he opened it, remarked carelessly :

"Let's see; there was a niece, wasn't there? What has become of *her*?"

Triggs glared at him savagely, but said nothing, so that Dan continued pleasantly :

"I did hear she was dead; died soon after you were married, Mr. Triggs."

Triggs had now got outside the door, which he held for a moment in his hand, whilst he rejoined, quite gently for *him*, and in an absent sort of way :

"Yes, she's dead."

Then he slammed the door to, and went his way.

Mr. Tribe returned to his apartment chuckling :

"I think I had him there," he said to himself. "Even *his* armour has one joint. I wish I could find another; I do so like to give that sort of man a dig."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MR. TRIGGS GOES TO ASCOT.

THURSDAY in the Ascot week was a glorious day, and Mr. Triggs went down to see the race for the Cup—nominally, at least. But the real fact was that he had a considerable stake upon the event, and a stake of even more interest than value to him, so that he determined to go and watch for himself how things would turn out for him; besides, he was a little curious to see how Captain and Mrs. Davies “did the thing;” for they did not often ask for the pleasure of *his* company on such occasions—nor, indeed, if they had asked for it, would they have been likely to obtain it. He had something better to do with his time, he would say, than to spend it in tomfoolery.

Mrs. Triggs did not accompany her husband, though he had not concealed from her that he was going to Ascot, and had led her to understand that she could do as she pleased about joining him. But Mrs. Triggs had from the first accepted, in a strong-minded manner, the difference between the position of Mr. and Mrs. Triggs, the people of business in the city, and that of Captain and Mrs. Davies, the people of fashion at the West End; had eschewed all expensive frivolities; had carefully abstained from attending the entertainments of her fashionable relatives, partly for her husband's sake, partly from pride, partly from distaste, partly from a determination not to countenance her relatives' profuse expenditure; and, since she had attained the dignity of motherhood, the alteration which Triggs had observed to have taken

place in her had tended to confirm her in her quiet domestic habits.

Her household cares in the morning, her drive with her child in the afternoon, her bits of business in the evening, when she would make herself of considerable use to Triggs in many ways—such was her grasp of current events as recorded in the newspapers, and so great was her shrewdness in suggestion and her dexterity in the manipulation of figures—would have sufficed for her occupation, had she not added to her labours by entering, to her husband's astonishment, but still with his free consent, on the ground of its undoubted and valuable respectability, as an increment of percentage, into parochial matters connected with the sick and needy.

And so Ascot, Cup or no Cup, had no attraction for her.

Triggs, therefore, went down alone. He was in excellent spirits, although he was a little anxious about the double event. He was quite sure of it, he felt, before long; but he might win it that very day. He had ascertained that Mr. Tribe had transacted all the necessary business; and if Captain Davies, who had lost heavily on the Derby, and recouped himself but little on the Oaks, and had already been very unfortunate at Ascot, should not "have a turn" over the Cup, he had candidly confessed to Mr. Triggs that no money would be forthcoming, and the ownership of the house with the portico at Notting Hill would be transferred at once to Mr. Triggs, who smiled to himself with pleasure at the thought, and his spirits rose every moment.

He had never been to a race before in his life, and the novelty was of itself charming. His great physical force stood him in good stead at the Waterloo Railway Station; and the crush, which made even men turn pale under the pressure, and made delicate women scream, as their lace was trodden from their skirts, was mere child's-play to him. Nor was he troubled with scruples about courtesy, so that he, without much difficulty, made his way into a first-class carriage, into which he was followed by five other men, filling the compartment. Here he had his first adventure, which amused him prodigiously.

He sat in a corner, and in the next seat to him sat a youth, apparently about twenty years of age, and of bashful demeanour; in the opposite corner sat a venerable old man, with white hair and blue spectacles, and next to the Venerable sat a semi-military-looking man with an eye-glass. Two gentlemen, evidently friends, and evidently of good position, occupied the other two seats.

"Do you object to smoking, sir?" asked the Semi-military of the Venerable, who answered:

"I do not, sir; but perhaps the other gentlemen——"

He was interrupted by a chorus of assurances that nobody objected.

Whereupon the Bashful, addressing Triggs diffidently, observed that it was "a fine day for the race," to which Triggs vouchsafed only so gruff an assent that the Bashful was apparently much crestfallen, and would have collapsed, but that the Venerable, as became his benevolent appearance, came to the rescue of the youth, and, with a glance of mild reproach at Triggs, said:

"We are extremely fortunate, sir, to have such lovely weather."

"Specially when you don't often get a chance to see a race," sniggered the Bashful.

Hereupon the Semi-military, who had been moving uneasily upon his seat, suddenly cried:

"The journey down is so tedious, that's the worst of it. Who's for a game o' whist, now?"

No answer.

"I always carry a pack o' cards," he continued, as he produced one from his pocket, and held them up, in case anybody should require ocular evidence of so strange a habit.

Nobody took any notice.

Finding himself left to his own devices for amusement, he selected three cards, apparently from his pack, which, thus diminished, he returned to his pocket, and, having spread out a newspaper upon his knees, began to play, with an ace, a knave, and a ten, a curious sort of solitary game, which seemed to perfectly fascinate the Bashful, whose gaze the

player, as he looked up, caught fixed upon the proceeding.

"Can you do this trick?" asked the Semi-military, taking his cigar out of his mouth, and smiling graciously.

"Don't know what it is," replied the Bashful, with a grin.

"Well, you see," rejoined the other, "I have here an ace, a knave, and a ten," as he turned up the faces and showed them, turning them back again immediately; "I just play leap-frog with 'em one over another, like this, and I give 'em a twist and a jerk round, like this, and I can bet you a sovereign you don't tell me which is the ace."

"Don't—you—bet—young man," said the Venerable solemnly; "anyhow it ought to be two to one, you've only one chance out of three."

"You'd be right," said the Semi-military imperturbably, "if it were a mere case of chance; but it's a matter of skill and sharpness of sight in detection."

"How did you learn it, pray?" asked the Venerable, in a tone which might have excused an angry reply.

"Oh!" answered the Semi-military, with a careless laugh; "I lost a fiver over it once to a man called Hanky-Panky, who lived by it; and he taught me out of gratitude. I was a dab once, but I'm out of practice."

He had all the while been passing the cards one over the other, and he now spun them nimbly upon the newspaper.

The Bashful looked at the cards as if he could eat them, and even the Venerable cast sheep's eyes at them. Triggs sat grim and stolid, but watching all that went on.

"You think you know which is the ace, don't you?" asked the Semi-military, with a laugh, of the Bashful.

"I'd swear to it," answered the Bashful excitedly; and even the Venerable relaxed, and pointed at a certain card over the Semi-military's shoulder, whereupon the Bashful smiled and nodded assent.

"Will you bet a sovereign?" asked the Semi-military quietly.

The Bashful shook his head in negation.

"Will you take three to two?"

The Bashful wavered; but again refused.

"Will *you*, sir?" asked the Semi-military of the Venerable, who merely exclaimed aghast:

"Me!"

"Oh! I beg pardon, I'm sure," observed the Semi-military. "I thought you seemed rather disposed that way. Will *you*, sir?" he asked, bowing to Mr. Triggs.

"No, I won't," growled Mr. Triggs.

"That's plain English," remarked the Semi-military with a laugh; and he looked furtively in the direction of the two remaining occupants of the compartment, but, for some reason, did not address them. At last he returned to the Bashful, and asked:

"Which do you say is the ace?"

The Bashful pointed with a chuckle at a certain card, saying:

"I say it's that 'un."

"I'll go to gaol, if it isn't," chimed in the Venerable with sudden vivacity.

The Semi-military smiled, and said to Triggs:

"And which do *you* think it is, sir?"

"That," replied Triggs, suddenly reaching out his hand and turning up the card which had been selected.

It was the ace.

"Hands off, sir, please," observed the Semi-military, in an injured tone, amidst a general laugh from the Bashful, the Venerable, and Triggs; "here, I'll do it again," he continued, as he rapidly manipulated the cards. "Three quid to two, nobody picks out the ace—three sovereigns to two, nobody spots the ace!"

"Done! Done!" exclaimed the Bashful and the Venerable in a breath.

"You bet, sir?" asked the Semi-military of Triggs.

"Bet!" sneered Triggs with emphatic scorn; "I can do something better with *my* money. There was no money on last time," he added significantly.

"Well, you two are on," observed the Semi-military, by no means disconcerted, to the Bashful and the Venerable, who both assented; "now, choose."

Each chose a card ; and in each case it was wrong.

In the twinkling of an eye Triggs had turned up the third card, and lo ! *that was not an ace.*

The Semi-military was not a bit abashed. "What o' that?" he replied to the groan of indignation; "it's a fair bet; I bet nobody would pick out the ace."

They had now reached a station, and the Semi-military, the Venerable, and the Bashful, suddenly ceased from wrangling about their bets, and all three left the carriage. The two friends, who had taken no part in the proceedings, burst out laughing, and one said to the other :

"No go, here; they're gone to try fresh fields and pastures new; they may find a flat in some other carriage."

"Not a bad bonnet, that old fellow," was the rejoinder.

Triggs had heard all the speakers had said, and a sudden light flashed upon him. He now turned towards one of the gentlemen, and observed :

"Confederates, of course, gen'l'men?"

"Oh yes!" answered one of the gentlemen politely; "no doubt of it. I attend a great many races, and I fancy I know their faces."

"I noticed that the principal feller seemed rather shy of *you*," said Triggs with a laugh. "Pray, what's a bonnet?—same as a welcher, I suppose?"

"Not exactly," was the reply, given with a smile; "they are both swindlers, but a bonnet is a confederate who covers the proceedings of the chief actor; a welcher is a man who swindles on his own account, by betting small sums upon a horse-race, when he can't or won't pay if he loses. If you go into the enclosure in front of the Grand Stand at Ascot, you'll see many a welcher, I'm afraid. Welchers go about, offering sometimes more than the proper odds against a horse, in a very loud voice, for a pound or two, or even a few crowns, and, when the horse they have betted against loses, they bolt, having taken good care to get ready money staked with them, on the ground that they couldn't go looking all over the course for their debtors, whereas they themselves can always be found at the betting-place."

"A welcher's much the same as a defaulter, then, I s'pose," remarked Triggs.

"Well, *I* don't see much difference," was the reply, given with a pleasant laugh. "The difference is about the same as that between reckless trading and downright robbery; and I don't think there's much to choose between them."

"Reckless trading, sir," said Triggs with much energy, "*is* robbery."

"Anyhow," rejoined the other speaker carelessly, "the poor welcher often pays with his skin, and sometimes with his life, for a crime which is no greater than that of the banker who takes your money into his hands and coolly settles it on his wife, to make his family secure at your expense, when he goes smash. I would just as soon see a banker-hunt as a welcher-hunt."

"A welcher-hunt!" exclaimed Triggs: "what's that?"

"Perhaps you'll see one to-day," answered the other; "there's no mercy for a welcher; every man's hand is against him; the moment a man is accused of welching, everybody takes part against him and hustles him out of the betting-enclosure; and then the crowd gets hold of him, and when he takes to his heels, as he is pretty sure to do, they give chase, with sticks and stones, and anything they can grab, and treat him worse than a pack of boys would treat a rat. Even the police will hardly interfere to save a welcher's life."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Triggs: "that must be rare fun. I'd like to see a welcher-hunt."

The two gentlemen looked at him curiously, whilst he was convulsed with laughter at the picture presented to his imaginative faculties.

In a short time they reached Ascot, and Mr. Triggs, vastly exhilarated by the incidents and conversation of his journey, shouldered his way through the obstructive fly-drivers, and proceeded merrily on foot through the five hundred yards of brown dust up to the Grand Stand. When he made up his mind to do an expensive thing, he was not the man to shirk; but he could not repress an outcry of surprise and indignation at the price he had to pay for admittance, and for luncheon

and champagne. Having fortified himself with luncheon, he ascended to the roof of the stand, and arrived there just in time to see the course cleared for the first race, and to witness the arrival of the royal pageant. With the assistance of a good glass and a communicative neighbour he took in a great deal of information, in a very few minutes, through his eyes and ears. He could see for himself, and he smiled when his neighbour informed him, that the lady so gracefully sweeping across the course under the escort of two gentlemen, one Captain Davies and the other Major Shorthose, was "pretty Mrs. Davies, who is always at the principal races." But he would not have known why Captain Davies parted from his wife and the major, as they drew near to the Grand Stand, and went by himself towards the left as you look from the Stand, had not the communicative neighbour said: "Gone to the paddock, of course, to see the horses before they come out." Nor would he have known, but for the communicative neighbour, that "the chap in a green coat, with a flower in his button-hole, and with something like a convict's fetters round his neck, riding at the head of the Royal procession," was the Master of the Buckhounds, with his "couples," the symbols of his office, on his shoulder. He was indebted, moreover, to his neighbour for a description of the course.

"That straight bit," said the neighbour, "all up hill, to your right, where you see the procession coming along now, is called the T.Y.C., or two-year-old course, the last five furlongs or so of the New Mile, which begins right at the bottom of the straight as far as ever you can see. Just over yonder, you observe, still to your right, but not far down, there is a track running into the straight. Now, start from that point, follow that track away out yonder, bearing constantly to your left, and, after going about two miles, circularly, you will find yourself at the paddock or thereabouts, round here on your left. The course, in fact, is rather like a P laid horizontally before you, with the tail down the straight there to your right, and the loop, with the extra bit lopped off, lying with the curve away from you; or, it's more like a banjo, perhaps, with the handle down the straight to your

right. You want to know which is the Cup Course. Well, you see that post down there in the straight, about half a mile, or a little less, from here; that's called the Cup Post; they start from there, come up past the Stand, round the loop of the P or the circular part of the banjo, coming into the straight again at the join over yonder on your right, and pass the Stand again up to the winning-post, over there to your left, almost opposite the paddock-gate, making about two miles and a half of it: and quite enough too, if the pace is made tolerably hot, to get to the bottom of the best horse ever foaled."

"Then we get 'em twice past us here," said Triggs joyously; "once when they're fresh and once when they're beat."

"Just so," assented the other; "they are beaten the second time, or never."

"What's the odds about The Sneezer for the Cup?" asked Triggs carelessly.

"Do you want to back him?" asked the other smiling; "I don't bet myself, but you can be accommodated, I've no doubt, down below."

"Oh no," replied Triggs; "I don't bet; but I know a man who does, and I was rather curious about the odds, as I believe he has backed The Sneezer heavily."

"He'll win, I should say," remarked the other; "I've heard people say The Sneezer can't lose, and good judges too."

Mr. Triggs looked slightly discontented, for Captain Davies had said: "If The Sneezer don't win, Triggs, I shan't be able to pay you your money."

Having seen three races from his elevated position on the roof, Mr. Triggs thought he would descend to the enclosure. Here he found a scene which almost bewildered him, cool as he was and accustomed as he was to the transaction of business in the midst of turbulence.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RACE FOR THE CUP.

THE bell was tolling, the clearance of the course for the big race was beginning. Both on the outside and the inside of the enclosure there was nothing but noise and confusion. People were wandering to and fro, backwards and forwards, like so many polar bears in a cage ; but unlike polar bears, they were shouting, gesticulating, jabbering, disputing.

First of all, Triggs went close to the railings and watched with much interest the process by which the police were gradually producing order and a clear space on the outside, from what looked very like hopeless chaos and an utterly unmanageable multitude. He was amused at the good-humoured way in which the constables, moving about, at first, by ones and twos and threes among the people and crying " Outside—outside—outside !" got the course free of the more docile individuals whom a gentle hint is sufficient to bring to a sense of their duty. He was still more amused to observe how the constables, forming by degrees into lines in open order right across the course, began to put a little more pressure on the crowd, without attempting, however, to stem the advancing torrent of human beings by sheer force, but allowing passage to anybody who was deaf to their mild expostulation and to their waving of hands. And he was most amused to see how, when the lines of constables took close order and swept the diminished numbers of people to right and left of the course, the more refractory members of the public would dodge round

the ends of one line of constables and reappear in the middle of the course to be once more swept aside by another line, until, the pace of the men in authority being increased, and line quickly following upon line, with here and there a mounted constable to pursue the rebellious, whilst the voices which shouted "Outside—outside!" became sterner and more peremptory, and a little physical force was also applied, the race-course assumed the appearance of almost complete clearance, save for the occasional darts made by restless or daring individuals from one side to the other, for the transit of dignified, slow-moving ladies and gentlemen to their seats in the various stands, and for the constant ebb and flow of real or would-be connoisseurs in horse-flesh between the enclosure and the paddock. Mr. Triggs, moreover, observed how, as if by magic, those policemen, to whom the duty of keeping the public beyond the rails on both sides of the course was assigned, had imperceptibly dropped into their places at a few yards' distance from one another.

He now turned round to contemplate the inside of the enclosure, where disorder seemed to increase in proportion as order was established outside. Men, like maniacs to look upon, were rushing frantically to and fro, and vociferating furiously; and the burthen of their vociferations was in all cases much the same: "I'll bet on the Cup; I'll bet on the Cup; on the Cup I'll bet; I'll bet agin The Sneezer, Moloch, Grindstone, and Beelzebub; I'll lay 6 to 1 bar two, 6 to 1 bar two." There was one man more vehement than all the rest; he was pale, haggard, and shabbily dressed, but for all his shabbiness, he was more generous than his brethren: "I'll bet on the Cup—on the Cup—on the Cup!" he yelled; "I'll bet 7 to 1 bar two. What d'ye want, sir?" he howled almost fiercely, as he halted in his wild career and lifted his downcast eyes to look Triggs straight in the face. But, at the sight, something seemed to stagger him. "I'll b-b-bet——" he faltered and stood like one astounded.

Triggs recognised him at once, smiled a grim smile, and shouted, as a bright idea flashed across his vengeful mind:

"Ho, ho! Master Bent; turned welcher, eh?"

Bent looked wildly around him, like vermin looking for an outlet from a place of confinement; but the fatal word had been uttered and heard. "Welcher!" was caught up on all sides, and Bent's frightened appearance and evident dread of Triggs did more than anything else to stamp him guilty of "welching." In vain he protested:

"Oh, Mr. Triggs, I ain't a welcher; not *that*, sir, not *that*."

And in vain he drew from a bag he carried a handful of sovereigns, and pleaded:

"I *can* pay, and I do."

"Look at the scoundrel!" shouted Triggs; "he's made a pretty good thing of it."

In a jiffey the sovereigns were sent flying out of Bent's hand, and picked up, as they fell, by more disreputable-looking vagabonds than Bent himself. His seedy hat was smashed down over his eyes; his coat was torn off his back; his money-bag was cut from his waist, and its contents scattered over the ground; and with cries of "Welcher! welcher!" he was cuffed, and hustled, and dragged towards the rails. "Welcher! spike him! spike him!—go it, put him on the spikes!" roared a most benevolent-looking old gentleman, as he aimed with an umbrella a vicious blow at Bent's head, and then, exhausted with his effort, said apologetically to Triggs: "I wouldn't hurt a worm, sir, but, damme! welchers ought to be exterminated." Meanwhile a score of stalwart arms had made short work of Bent's expulsion from the enclosure, hoisting him bodily over the rails, and letting him fall like a log on the other side. Up he jumped, with the blood oozing from his nostrils, and his face livid with the blows he had received. Hatless and coatless, he sped, like the wind, across the course, amid the derisive laughter of all beholders. Even the police were surprised out of their gravity, and grinned approval.

And still the shout of "Welcher!" pursued him as he charged with desperation among the throng of spectators on the opposite side of the course, with the whimpered prayer, in agonised tones:

"For God's sake let me pass!"

They let him pass, but they cuffed him as he passed; and, as he darted down the hill and across the circle, of which the racecourse formed the circumference, a hundred idlers joined in pursuit, with a whoop and a yell of "Welcher! welcher!" Already his waistcoat and his shirt were torn from his back, as his coat had been; but, nevertheless, he continued his headlong career, breathless, panting, naked, and bleeding. His trousers, and socks, and boots were all that remained of his clothes. It was clear that he intended to take the water, for he headed towards a large pond, whither the pack of tormentors pursued him, with volleys of stones and brickbats, and with joyous screams of "Welcher! welcher!—duck him! duck him!" But he did not wait to be ducked; in he dashed spontaneously, hoping, no doubt, to bring his persecutors to a standstill; and in this he succeeded. But stones and brickbats could yet reach him; and a great shout of laughter arose as a dozen missiles struck him full upon the back of the head, and he dropped with a splash in the middle of the water.

The laughter, however, grew fainter and fainter, and at last ceased altogether, when two or three minutes had elapsed and no "welcher" had reappeared.

The hunters of the "welcher" were beginning to look uneasy at one another, when a sound of hoofs was heard galloping up; for the scene had not escaped the notice of the police-superintendent, Argus-eyed, kind-hearted, high-perched upon a gallant gray. To a mounted constable he had given his orders thus:

"Thompson, I see they are still hunting that fellow over there; just go and see they don't kill the poor devil."

Thompson had done his best; but his steed was not of the sort with which men win the Ascot Cup. The pack of hounds that had been hunting the "welcher" no sooner saw the constable arriving than, under the influence of their cowardly instincts, they broke and fled in half-a-dozen different directions. Thompson, at a glance, comprehended the state of affairs; he had come too late.

Mr. Triggs, with the help of his good field-glass, had followed the chase for a considerable distance, until it was

hidden from his view by the nature of the ground and the intervention of obstacles. He then relaxed the tight grip with which he had held his glass, and the rigidity with which he had shut his mouth and clenched his teeth, and, with a grim smile of satisfaction, turned his attention to the coming race.

The competitors had already emerged from the paddock, and were being led up and down in single file before the occupants of the royal box. One, two, three, four, five, six: three four-year-olds, and three three-year-olds; the former were The Sneezer, Moloch, and Grindstone; and the latter Beelzebub, and two others. The chances of those two might be inferred from the facetious remark made by the jockey of the one to the jockey of the other: "Me and you'll see the start on our'n, Tom." The race was considered to lie between The Sneezer and Moloch; evens about The Sneezer; 2 to 1 against Moloch; 6 to 1 bar two. Of the three-year-olds, Beelzebub had a considerable following, notwithstanding the oracular utterance of a very dirty man, who was never tired of relieving his feelings by confiding his opinions to the winds, and roaring, as if he defied the world: "No three-year-old won't win this race; no three-year-old won't win this race!"

Mr. Triggs had taken up a position close to the railings, that he might have a near view of the horses; and, as they passed in the preliminary canter, he cordially agreed with a neighbour, who shouted, as The Sneezer went bounding by, "My word, there goes a flyer."

And indeed The Sneezer did go like flying. His action was the most taking in the world; with his head pretty high, his neck slightly arched, his ears pricked, and his fore-legs gracefully bent at the knee, he went lightly, jauntily, joyously along, as if the elastic turf were a veritable spring-board; he seemed literally to spurn the ground; and a pretty knack he had of flinging up his two hind heels, at every stride, gave a particularly airy appearance to his style.

Very different was the gigantic Moloch: he went with his head low, between his knees, as if he would drag his jockey from the saddle; he seemed to concentrate his whole mass upon his neck, with his hind-quarters higher than his fore;

his hoofs seemed to rest awhile upon the ground, as if to get purchase for another stride; he was voted a "great boring brute" by his enemies, but his friends and admirers were content to remark that he "covered a deal of ground at a stretch," and so he certainly seemed to, though his size was enough to create that idea.

The other horses received but little notice, although a quiet, contemplative, closely-shaven, neatly-dressed little man, who stood near Triggs, and needed no label to proclaim his connection with stables, observed, as the horses walked down to the starting-post:

"Grindstone's a nice level 'oss."

This observation was the signal for a perfect storm of offers to "bet agin Grindstone," to which the little man responded civilly:

"Thankee, I'm suited."

And now there was a momentary lull amongst the stentorian bettors in the enclosure, but there was a commotion and a roar amongst the general spectators. The people in and upon the carriages jumped to their feet, a bell began to toll, a thumping sound was heard in the distance, coming nearer and nearer, louder and louder, clearer and clearer; and in a few seconds Triggs could hear the very rustle of the silken jackets as the six horses and their riders shot past, up the ascent, right under his nose.

Three and two and one, but all in a cluster; and he had hardly made out that Moloch was one of the two, and that The Sneezer was the single one, last, when they had begun the descent and were quickly beyond his vision.

The vociferous bettors began their monotonous shouts again, and hardly ceased when, some four minutes having elapsed, the horses were seen coming round the turn into the straight. The last was first and the first were last. Two of the three-year-olds were tailed off; The Sneezer was leading, Beelzebub and Moloch were a length behind him, and Grindstone a length behind them. When they were fairly in the straight Beelzebub's jockey was seen to wriggle and his whip to describe perpetual curves.

"Beelzebub's beat!" was the cry: and so he was, dropping back, whilst Grindstone came up level with Moloch, and both went on in pursuit of The Sneezer, who was going as gallantly as ever. Nevertheless, Grindstone next the rails and Moloch on the outside were gradually overhauling The Sneezer, keeping him in the middle; and in this way they came up to the Grand Stand and were approaching the goal, when a great groan of execration startled even the far from delicate nerves of Mr. Triggs, who asked his neighbour:

"What the devil's the matter?"

"Don't you see the coward's cut it?" was the reply in a tone of bitter disgust. "The Sneezer wins, and bad luck to him."

And sure enough, as the speaker ended, Mr. Triggs saw that the gigantic Moloch had answered the call of whip and spur, too energetically, perhaps, applied, by swerving right across the course, leaving The Sneezer and Grindstone to fight out the battle.

This they did bravely, replying to every prick of the steel and every stroke of the whalebone and, one might almost have fancied, every shout of "Sneezer! Sneezer!" "Grindstone! Grindstone!" that accompanied them at every stride, with the most generous obedience. Triggs and his neighbour waited impatiently for the number of the winner to be hoisted on the telegraph-board. Two numbers were hoisted on the same horizontal line.

"A dead heat, by all that's blue!" said a neighbour to Triggs.

"What then?" asked Triggs anxiously.

"Run off, of course, after the last race," said the other, with a look of astonishment at the question: "they never divide for the Ascot Cup."

Triggs was highly disappointed to find that The Sneezer would have another chance; but was consoled a little upon reflecting that the chance would tell two ways. He strolled along the course to divert his thoughts; and, as he passed two gentlemen in conversation, he heard one of them, a tall, burly, bluff, commanding man, who looked as if he would

ride at least eighteen stone, who talked as if he were in a gale of wind, and who was treated with a deference due to something more than the veneration vouchsafed to the hoary head, say to the other :

"They'll bet 2 to 1 on The Sneezer, and Grindstone will win."

Mr. Triggs continued his stroll in better spirits, and had gone only a few steps when he met Captain Davies, who exclaimed with more surprise apparently than pleasure, though with perfect politeness and good-humour :

"What! you here, Triggs! What did you think of the race? Splendid finish, wasn't it? Will you back Grindstone for the deciding heat?"

"Will you?" growled Triggs. "You know I don't bet."

"No, thank you," replied Captain Davies, laughing; "I've just come from the paddock, where I went to see how they looked after the race, and whether it would be worth my while to hedge. But it certainly would not; indeed I'm off now to put all the money I can on The Sneezer. He was much fresher than Grindstone; and, besides, he'll make the running this time. Oh! it's more than 2 to 1 on him—it's a guinea to a shilling."

At this moment the two gentlemen whom Triggs had heard conversing came by.

"Do you know who that is?" asked Triggs, designating the tall burly man of about eighteen stone.

"Don't you?" rejoined Captain Davies; "why that's the Admiral."

"What Admiral?" demanded Triggs.

"What admiral! Why there's only one Admiral on a racecourse—the Admiral, the best judge of a racehorse in the world."

"Thankee," replied Triggs: "I thought it was somebody o' that sort. Good-day; I wish you luck with The Sneezer."

"You'll find my wife up there in the boxes," said Captain Davies, as he turned on his heel; but the remark was probably not meant, and certainly not taken, to be a very pressing invitation.

Mr. Triggs returned to the Grand Stand, and once more mounted to the roof, as he felt unusual interest in the deciding heat for the Cup, and was determined to see as much as he could of the race. And from the roof, with the help of his glass, he could follow, more or less distinctly or indistinctly, the whole of the struggle from first to last. There were three events to come before the contest between the dead-heaters. All three were uninteresting to him; and so he spent the interval principally in taking a bird's-eye view, from his elevated position, of the proceedings in the enclosure. There was a perfect sea of human beings tossing and heaving; and there was "that Leviathan" taking his pastime therein. A dull roar, softened by distance, but incessant, save for a second or two, just at the start and just after the finish, till the numbers went up, made a continual humming in his ears. He smiled at the busy sight and sound, for business of any kind delighted him; and then he grew serious to think that he had probably more at stake than all but a very few of those restless "operators." He had no chance of losing any money, certainly, or at any rate without an equivalent; but he had a chance of winning, that very day, the double event, for which he had schemed and waited so long, and for which, should Captain Davies be a very great gainer, he might have to wait a weary while longer.

At last the critical moment arrived. Out came the two horses, without an instant's delay. This time there was no parade, no canter. They walked straight down to the starting-post, in a very quiet manner. Both horses were cool and collected; both riders wore an air of unconcern. Of the horses The Sneezer looked the more alert. Grindstone had rather a sleepy expression, though his ears (to a less extent than The Sneezer's, however) were twinkling about in a highly intelligent manner, as if he would inform the crowd that he could see them, that he knew what they were all there for, that he didn't care an oat for anybody, and that, if they chose to back him, that was their look-out. The Sneezer, by his jaunty manner and demeanour, walking as if his hoofs were of india-rubber, and turning his head, from time to time,

right round, and regarding the crowd with a placid wonder in his brilliant eyes, elicited unbounded admiration. "Oh! you beauty!" cried an enthusiastic spectator near the rails, and "Dam, if he didn't 'ear me," he added, with delight, when The Sneezer, with his neck bent in the spectator's direction, neighed slightly as if in acknowledgment of the compliment.

Mr. Triggs, from his perch, observed that The Sneezer retarded the start for a few seconds, performing a reel and spinning round and round, as if he were winding himself up before he was set going. Grindstone, on the contrary, appeared rather inclined to utilise the respite thus gained in taking a few nibblets of grass, had his rider seen no objection to it. All at once, the favourable moment having been seized like lightning, a sharp short cry, unlike the former succession of shouts, and a few strokes of the bell, unlike the former, longer tolling, announced that the struggle was begun. Before the Grand Stand was reached for the first time, Triggs noticed that The Sneezer was leading by four or five lengths, and making the pace hotter and hotter as he flew, when he came to the descent. It was clear that his rider would, as Captain Davies had said, make the running all through, with the view of "cutting down" Grindstone. As there were now but two horses, Triggs could better remark the difference between their styles of going. It was the difference between Pegasus and Pherenicus, the heaven-born and the earth-born, poetry and prose, the gentleman and the professional, pastime and business. Mr. Triggs was devoted to business; and he watched, with a sort of fascination, the peculiar style of the non-favourite. Grindstone did not fly, he swept; he had no pretty knack of flinging up his heels, as if he spurned the ground, but he had a singular way of opening and shutting his legs, fore and aft, like a pair of compasses, as if he would exemplify the correctness of the French phrase, *ventre à terre*, to express full gallop; and he did not undulate in his course, as if distance were no object in comparison with swagger, but he went straight as an arrow on a windless day, as if it were a matter of importance to save every inch. Not once did Mr. Triggs completely lose sight of them and their

riders, for, when the conformation of the ground and the bushes almost hid them, he could see the tops of the jockeys' caps moving along like objects upon a slide, and now and then through occasional interstices came a flash from the silken colours. When they appeared on the top of the ascent, in the distance, nearly opposite the Stand, The Sneezer led by a dozen lengths, and by as many or more when they had accomplished the descent and were thundering along towards the turn into the straight. "By Gom, he's beat," said a voice close to Triggs, whose experience in racing had not enabled him to remark what the speaker had remarked.

"It's all over, I suppose?" observed Triggs resignedly.

"All over but shouting," rejoined the other coolly; "it's ten to one on Grindstone."

"Grindstone!" screamed Triggs in amazement.

"Look at that!" replied the other calmly.

And, even as he spoke, the two horses had come into the straight, but the gap had been reduced to two or three lengths, the rider of The Sneezer was "at it" hammer and tongs, whilst the rider of Grindstone was sitting as still as a statue. So they came on to the Grand Stand, where the rider of Grindstone administered a few arguments with the "persuaders" and one or two "ticklers" with his whalebone, and the gallant, patient, plodding beast responded nobly. First he reached The Sneezer's quarters, then he got level, and lastly, amidst a hurricane of shouts, he shot ahead and went on a winner. Not that The Sneezer ceased to struggle; but nature was well-nigh exhausted. And he went to the last with some of the old jaunty action; but the ears drooped back, the neck unarched, the head bobbing, and the well-set tail going up and down like a pump-handle bore witness to his deep distress.

"I never saw a worse beaten horse," said the neighbour with whom Triggs had conversed.

Triggs had kept his eye upon the telegraph-board, and, as Grindstone's number went up, he was so far moved from his usual stolidity of demeanour as to smite himself joyously upon the thigh.

"Won your money, sir, I perceive," said his neighbour pleasantly.

"I've won the double event," replied Triggs, somewhat to the other's astonishment, and immediately made his way down to the course. There he sought out the superintendent, mounted upon the gigantic gray horse, and, having found him, asked carelessly :

"Do you know what became of that 'welcher' the people got hold of?"

A cloud came over the superintendent's kindly countenance, and he answered :

"He was found drowned, poor devil, in a pond over yonder : it's my belief they killed him."

"Serve him right," replied Triggs, with a scowl.

The superintendent merely shrugged his shoulders and, with a glance of anything but the deepest possible respect at Triggs, rode off without any salutation.

Triggs made for the railway-station in high spirits, and he chuckled as he thought of the double event he had secured by coming to Ascot ; he had, as it were, won the cup, and he had been revenged on Bent ; he had, in fact, killed two birds with one stone.

And he had certainly killed Bent.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A CASUAL OBSERVATION.

THE Ascot week was over. That is to say, it was the last evening of the race-week, Friday evening. The Wokingham and the Alexandra Plate and the Ascot Plate had been lost and won; and Captain Davies, though he had by no means covered his losses, had recouped himself to the extent of a few thousand pounds. He was not a man of a despondent turn of mind, and his comparatively small gains had almost consoled him for his very heavy losses. It was true that he would not be able to pay Triggs what he had promised to pay after the Ascot meeting, at the risk, should he fail to fulfil his promise, of losing the house at Notting Hill; and so, if Triggs insisted upon his bond, the house must go. Captain Davies set no great store by the house; and Lurline had expressed her perfect indifference about it. He didn't want the house, and to let it slip was not like paying ready money; they would go abroad after the racing season was over, and perhaps settle there altogether. If he had a little more luck, such as had attended him on the last day at Ascot, before the racing year came to an end, they would have an income which would enable them to make a very fair show on the Continent. So he thought; and he grew quite cheerful, so thinking.

It was a lovely but a sultry evening, such as is common in the middle of June. Captain and Mrs. Davies had hired for the Ascot week a pretty cottage in a prettier garden on the road between Ascot and Windsor; and from the window of

the dining-room, the cottage being built upon the top of a slope, there was a view over the garden-palings of the high road and of the glorious old park beyond. At that window Captain Davies was sitting, smoking a cigar and amusing himself by watching, after dinner, the pedestrians and vehicles that still poured along, with a merry and even a drunken noise, over the dusty road and under the umbrageous trees of the park, from the racecourse to the royal borough. Lurline was reclining luxuriously upon a sofa at the same window, and regarding the scene with a half-eye-shut superciliousness. The pair had dined alone, for the first time during the week, this evening, as they wished to be pretty early, having to make their preparations for driving up to town on the morrow.

"Tired, Lurley?" asked Captain Davies kindly.

An impatient toss of the head was the only answer he got.

Captain Davies tried good-humouredly to entertain her, making incessant comments upon the passers-by, their grotesque appearance, their high spirits, and their sorry cattle.

Lurline took no sort of notice, beyond a glance at what was indicated and a contemptuous smile.

At last she made a casual observation:

"I've lost a lot of money," she said languidly.

"Eh? Where?" asked Captain Davies.

"On the racecourse."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday! I'm afraid it's too late to do anything, then."

"I'm *sure* it is."

"Why not tell me before, darling?"

"It will be quite soon enough *now*, I have no doubt."

"What *do* you mean? How much have you lost?"

"Twenty thousand pounds," answered Lurline with a yawn.

Captain Davies sprang to his feet; then, controlling himself, sat down again, deadly pale.

"Pray explain yourself, Lurley," he said with a sickly smile.

"Oh, certainly!" drawled Lurline; "I lost it betting on the Cup."

"Betting on the Cup!" exclaimed Captain Davies in astonishment.

"Yes, betting on the Cup," sneered Lurline pettishly; "I suppose I've as much right to bet as you have; especially as you bet with *my* money."

Captain Davies winced, but replied gently:

"Granted, Lurley. I knew, of course, that ladies betted, and rather high too, among themselves; and that the notion of their betting nothing but gloves was all rubbish. Lady Newstead and Lady Wessex and Lady Ruff, and a score of others, are well known to bet heavily, and not only among themselves but through the regular commissioners. I never, however, heard *you* bet in my life."

"I never did before," she said sullenly, and then she went on vehemently: "It's all your fault, so don't look so reproachful. You've taken me about to these horse-races and thrown me among these people, and you mustn't be surprised if I have followed your example and theirs. A lot of them, Lady Newstead and others, came into my box, and I betted with them all round. And, if I lost, *you* are to blame; you told me The Sneezer was *sure* to win; and I thought it was a good chance of recovering *my* money which *you* have lost."

Captain Davies did not recriminate, though there came into his mind recollections of her insisting upon going to the races with him, of her encouraging him to attend more of them than it had been his habit to frequent, of her urging him to increase the amount of his stakes, and of her own recklessness at the foreign gaming-tables, where she had lost more than ever he had lost upon the racecourse. However, he only remarked gently:

"The stakes must have been very heavy, Lurley."

"I betted monkeys," said she petulantly. "I thought I was sure to win—so *you* said, at least, and so did others; and I thought I might as well make a good deal while I was about it. And, as *I* had to lay the odds, I was obliged to make the

stakes pretty high, or else find more takers than I could expect, to get anything worth having."

Captain Davies could scarcely forbear a smile at this original view, but matters were too serious for smiling. It was in a tone of deep distress, but of perfect temper, that he remarked :

"It's a sad pity, Lurley ; I fear we're broke."

"Broke !" she cried petulantly ; "do you mean ruined ?"

"What with my losses and yours, I'm afraid we are," was the answer in a tremulous voice.

There was a short silence.

"*Must* I pay those cats ?" suddenly asked Lurline furtively. "They knew that I was as ignorant as a baby about such matters, though I *have* been at so many race-meetings with *you*, whereas they have it all at their fingers'-ends ; besides, they laughed at me and taunted me till I hardly knew what I was about. And then, if *they* had lost, they would only have lost a paltry five hundred pounds a-piece—a mere drop in the ocean to those wretches rolling in gold."

"If *you* don't, *I* must," answered Captain Davies quietly ; "and that would come to much about the same thing. The fact is that those ladies you have mentioned have even a keener sense, in betting matters, of honour—and money—than we men have ; and they are the more sensitive, because they haven't the same means as we men have of dealing with defaulters. If you hadn't yourself told me about the matter, I should very soon have heard from *them*, or from somebody on their behalf ; and so I should have been worse off than I am now. And I don't think we would either of us, Lurley, evade a debt of honour, even if there were no fear of being 'sent to Coventry' for it."

Lurline merely moved impatiently upon the sofa. At last she sat up suddenly, and, looking her husband full in the face, said spitefully :

"And now that you've spent all my money, pray what do you mean to do ? We've had to struggle and pinch enough for some time past."

Captain Davies, passing over the cruelty of the remark,

and the fact that the pinching and struggling had not yet been very severe, and had amounted hitherto to nothing worse than some retrenchment and restraint upon extravagance, replied softly :

"Upon my word, Lurley, I hardly know. When my debts and—and—what I am liable for" (he wouldn't say "and yours") "are paid, we shall have barely ten thousand pounds left, I'm afraid. The best thing I can think of is that I should cut racing altogether (in fact, *that I must* do), get put upon the list for active service, and take you with me to India."

"Never !" said Lurline passionately.

Captain Davies looked at her wistfully.

"I won't be poor, and I won't go to India !" cried Lurline excitedly. "What! go and live in nasty barracks !"

"You needn't do that, Lurley," rejoined the Captain composedly ; "and we shouldn't be half so poor as many other fellows in the regiment."

"I tell you I will *not* go to India," said Lurline angrily, fixing her flashing eyes upon him ; "rather than do that and be poor, I'll—I'll——"

She stopped suddenly, and did not finish her sentence.

"Well, *what* will you do ?" asked Captain Davies tranquilly.

"You shall see," she answered, with a defiant glance ; "but I *will not* be poor, and I *will not* go to India !"

Captain Davies looked pensively for a while out of the window at the curiously-marked sky. The atmosphere was very oppressive, and a few flashes of lightning were zigzagging about.

"There'll be a storm before long," he observed, as he turned to address Lurline.

But she had left the room.

She had gone up to her dressing-room, where she lighted the candles and wrote a little note, which she addressed to Major the Hon. John Shorthose, Rosebank, Wimbledon.

It was posted that very night.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A VISITOR AT ROSEBANK.

CAPTAIN DAVIES, after luncheon the next day, drove up to town his neatest of mail-phaetons, graced by the presence of the lovely Mrs. Davies at his side, whirled lightly over the ground by a faultless pair of chestnuts, and finished off by a most perfectly-equipped groom, with a cockade upon his hat and his arms folded after the manner rendered fashionable by the conqueror of Austerlitz. The equipage elicited the most unbounded admiration from all beholders, who thought what a charming couple they were, the Captain and his wife, and what a charming week or five days or so they must have spent at Ascot.

The charming couple scarcely exchanged a syllable, though Captain Davies made many unsuccessful overtures.

The charming couple, having reached their town-house, dined together, without visitors and without servants, save for the necessary business of the table. The conversation was of too private and confidential a sort for the presence of pitchers or of anything else having ears.

"I was hard at work this morning, Lurley," said Captain Davies gravely, "looking over our affairs."

"Well!" was the careless rejoinder, in a snappish tone.

"I'm afraid they are as bad as bad can be, Lurley."

"What do you propose, then?"

"I can think of no better plan than I told you of, darling. Pay off all debts; scrape together as much money as I can;

invest it to the best advantage, but safely; and get sent upon foreign service to India."

"I *will not* go to India."

"My dear Lurley!"

"I *will not* go to India: there!"

"Then stay at home, dear. I'll settle every farthing I possibly can upon you, and I'll try to make you comfortable."

"Comfortable! Bah! How can you be comfortable when you are poor? I *won't* be poor."

"I'm afraid there's no help for it, Lurley," said Captain Davies tenderly, but with a melancholy smile; "and by going with me to India, you would avoid many of the annoyances you would be liable to here from a change of circumstances."

"Oh! how I wish I had married a man who could make money as well as spend it or lose it," she rejoined bitterly; "a man who would have made my ten thousand a year twenty, instead of reducing it to a beggarly five hundred or less!"

"I wish *I* had that power, dear, for both our sakes," replied Captain Davies ruefully, and without a word of defence or recrimination.

She was silent for a while. At last she exclaimed, looking fixedly at him:

"Then you're determined upon that mad scheme of going to India?"

"It's the only move *I* can see."

"Once more I tell you, *I'll not* go."

Captain Davies felt his patience giving way, and, dinner being over, he rose from his chair, saying a little testily:

"Do as you please."

"I certainly mean to," was the defiant rejoinder. "Pray, where are you going to now?"

"To the club; and I shall most likely be late."

"And what do you suppose *I* am going to do?"

Captain Davies looked at her with the greatest surprise.

"My dear Lurley," he said gravely, "you haven't seemed to care about *my* society much for some time past; and I thought you would have plenty to do, having just come home.

I *must* go to the club, as I promised to meet two or three fellows there, but, if you would really like me to be with you, I'll be back as soon as ever I can."

She laughed scornfully.

"I want you!" she sneered; "you may go, for all I care, to—India."

Captain Davies answered not a word, but hastily left the room.

It was nearly 1 A.M. when he returned. He went up to his room at once, and the first thing he observed was a note, unaddressed, pinned to the corner of the toilet-table. It contained these words, in Lurline's handwriting:

"I've gone away, and I'm not coming back. Runaway wives sometimes ask forgiveness; *I do not*. Now you can go to India as soon as you please, and *I shall stay with the man I love.*"

Captain Davies was too much overcome to exhibit any particular emotion. He shuddered and turned very cold. He put himself to bed mechanically and from sheer habit, and he slept a little, from the downright numbness which had come over him and which acted as an opiate.

In the meanwhile, a visitor had arrived at the exquisite little box called Rosebank, belonging to Major the Hon. John Shorthose, at Wimbledon. It was a perfect gem of a villa, small but luxuriously furnished, standing in its own beautiful but not extensive grounds, which were kept in such perfect order as no apple-pie could give an idea of. In fact it was exactly the sort of place for a bachelor of the wealth and taste which distinguished Major Shorthose, who was already rich, with the prospect of being richer in due course, and who had three or four such little boxes in different counties, besides his sumptuous chambers in the Albany.

Mrs. Davies had created a carefully-suppressed astonishment amongst her household, and especially in the mind of her own particular maid, by ordering a cab at a late hour, taking with her nothing but a dressing-bag, bidding her

servant to "tell the man to drive to Waterloo Station," and saying, with her quiet, haughty, languid manner, that she would "not be home certainly before Monday." When she arrived at the Waterloo Station she had taken a ticket, not "return," to Wimbledon; and when she reached Wimbledon she had taken a fly, and requested, or rather intimated her imperious will, to be driven to Rosebank, Major Shorthose's. As the fly drove up the gravel-path to the villa, she looked eagerly out of the window. In a moment the door of the villa was thrown hospitably open, and in the doorway stood a smiling old dame and a bright, neat, modest-looking maid-servant. And behold! from the interior of the villa, along the little hall, glided the most bewitching of figures, dressed in the most elegant of costumes, and a lady of about Lurline's own age, the possessor of the figure and the wearer of the costume, passed rapidly between the old dame and the maid-servant, and, running down the doorsteps as the fly stopped, cried, in a merry, musical voice:

"The late Mrs. Davies! For you really are very late, dear; we were almost afraid you were not coming. Welcome! however, at any time." And she went up to the door of the fly to shake hands with the visitor.

Something seemed to be amiss with Lurline; she was pale as a sheet, and she shook perceptibly. However, she commanded herself sufficiently to reply:

"Thank you, *so* much. I really couldn't come earlier; there was so much to do after leaving Ascot, you know, dear Lady Stapleton."

"Of course," rejoined Lady Stapleton, kissing Lurline, who had descended, "we should have sent to meet you by every train up to the last, only John said that you had particularly requested that we should not do so, as you didn't know whether you might not have put off your visit at the last moment, and that, if you didn't arrive by the last train, you would not come at all—at any rate, before Monday. Susan will take your bag, dear; oh, she *has* taken it, I see. What a small amount of luggage! You will have to send for some more, let me tell you, for you *must* stay at least a week. Oh!

this is John's housekeeper, and a very old friend of mine—Mrs. Pearson. Let me introduce you."

Lurline made a haughty inclination to the old lady, who curtsied respectfully and smiled benignantly.

"John was so sorry that he couldn't be at home," Lady Stapleton rattled on, as she led the way into a side room, where there were refreshments, cool and appetising to look upon; "but he will be here to-morrow evening; and now, just give your things to Susan, and *do* make haste and eat some mayonnaise and drink some champagne, for you look like a ghost."

Mrs. Davies looked and moved as if in a dream; but she swallowed a few mouthfuls of mayonnaise and drank a glass of champagne; after which she revived a little.

"Come," said Lady Stapleton gaily, "you begin to look more like yourself. What will you do? It is only just midnight; and it is Sunday to-morrow, you know. *We* don't trouble church much; but we have a day of rest. Will you play a duet, or sing a duet? Or will you have a game at piquet or écarté? Or what do you feel inclined for?"

"I should like to go to bed, dear, please," answered Mrs. Davies. "I feel *very* tired."

"To tell you the truth," rejoined Lady Stapleton confidentially, "so do I. I will just ring for Susan to attend you to your room. And now, g—g—ood—n—n—night, my dear, dear, dear." And she hugged Mrs. Davies and kissed her again and again, finishing, as she turned away, with a sort of hysterical chuckle which sounded very like a sob.

Mrs. Davies went serenely up to her room, and, soon dismissing Susan, was alone with her own thoughts. Then, indeed, she was anything but serene. What meant this unusually gushing reception, this emotion, and this substitution of the sister, the gay young widow, for the brother, the gay "old bachelor" (though he was not much older than Captain Davies)? Had the gigantic idiot, as Mrs. Davies, in her anger, dubbed the tall and gallant Major, dared to trick her and befool her? Had he been in jest, whilst she had been in dreadful earnest? When he had heard her say that she

could perfectly conceive why wives should run away from their husbands, could he possibly have failed to interpret the meaning with which she pressed his arm? And when he had replied that, if she were ever reduced to that necessity, Rosebank was at her service, at any hour of the day or night, was it credible that he could have missed the glance with which she met his own, as she whispered: "Take care I don't put you to the test!" She looked in the glass, and, as she gazed upon the faithful reflection there, and remembered her many tender passages with the gallant son of Anak, whether on racecourse or in ball-room or elsewhere, she could have no doubt of the "mutual understanding," and she was more than ever puzzled to comprehend her position. Why it was only yesterday, the last day of the races, that he had, playfully of course, because playfulness (with, very often, how deep a covert seriousness!) is the only way of avoiding a risk of insult under such circumstances, reminded her of her half-implied promise and of his own anxiety to devote himself to her service. And she had answered, with a look that must have gone to his soul: "I take you at your word." And that very evening she had written her note. She had certainly found Rosebank at her service, but not in the way she had expected: and then those few words which she had left for her husband!

No wonder she passed a restless night.

By the next morning she had made up her mind as to her tactics. She would, of course, fall in completely with the course adopted by Lady Stapleton, who could not be supposed to know exactly how matters stood, but who was evidently, at any rate, quite prepared to consider the visit of Mrs. Davies as paid to herself rather than to her brother. Major Short-hose's soldier-servant was despatched to London, early on the Sunday morning, to fetch from Notting Hill such luggage as Mrs. Davies indicated in a note to her maid, for, as Lady Stapleton observed laughingly to the visitor: "You've really nothing to put on, dear; and I have asked some friends to dine with us this evening. Your notion of coming down with your dressing-bag and spending a Scotch Sawboth with John

and me and going back on Monday morning was very kind and friendly, but I have made different arrangements. We shall have half-a-dozen people to dinner : the room will not hold any more."

Mrs. Davies assented graciously. She thought that, on the whole, a little company would tend to make things pleasanter, and easier by relaxing the constraint.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CAPTAIN DAVIES REQUIRES AN EXPLANATION.

ON the Sunday morning, just about the time when conscientious church-women, such as Mrs. Triggs, had raised their voices in the "O be joyful" which follows with a somewhat odd effect, immediately upon the announcement that "Here endeth the second lesson" or upon the publication of the "banns," Captain Davies, after a troubled sleep, was descending the staircase to what he could not help shuddering to think would be his *solitary* breakfast, when he was conscious of a tall, soldierly figure, well known to him for many a long day, standing upright and motionless in the hall. The figure, apparently under the tacit orders of an inner conscientiousness whispering "Eyes front" and "Attention," had, the moment Captain Davies was visible, assumed the responsive look and attitude, and, when the Captain was at the proper distance, had "saluted" in the most approved fashion.

"Well, Hurley," said the Captain, as he acknowledged the salute, "what is it?"

"Come for some traps for Mrs. Davies, sir."

"Oh! very well," rejoined the Captain, who found his feelings rather troublesome, and who was not the sort of man to enter into his private affairs with a trooper, "you had better speak to the lady's-maid."

"I have, sir: they're coming, sir: I'm waiting, sir: that's all, sir."

"Where is Major Shorthose?"

"At the Halbany, sir."

At this unexpected reply, Captain Davies could not restrain a look of unbounded surprise, but he expressed none in words. He merely said, in his usual quiet easy manner:

"You don't come from the Albany?"

"No, sir: Rosebank, sir."

"Just so: you'll not have long to wait, I daresay."

And with a nod, acknowledged by another salute, he walked into the breakfast-room. He had not given way to the strong inclination he had felt to question trooper Hurley more particularly; and trooper Hurley, from nature, habit, and training did not volunteer information that was not sought. The man's manner was just the same as ever; he had not shown the very slightest symptom of knowing that, as he would have expressed himself, there was any "game up."

Captain Davies was much puzzled. It was quite plain that his wife had gone to Rosebank; and Rosebank belonged to Major Shorthose, who, as Captain Davies perfectly well knew, usually had nobody but an elderly housekeeper and a servant or two in the place. Major Shorthose must be called upon to explain the puzzle.

Captain Davies sat a while in deep thought. Some readers may be disappointed at the tame way in which he, a soldier and a brave one, a V.C. and a man who had charged through the jaws of death at Balaklava, behaved. They would probably expect him to provide himself with a pistol-case (and he had more than one very neat one), and, having justifiably jumped to the worst conclusions, rush out to the Albany and insist upon fighting Major Shorthose, then and there, over a handkerchief. But Captain Davies, though he was not what would be considered in many circles a clever man, had a great deal of sound sense and a gentleman's instinctive horror of greater notoriety than was absolutely unavoidable. He was, moreover, what is known as a "cool hand;" and, on due reflection, he saw every reason why the misfortune which had befallen him should be kept secret as long as possible. He, of course, would not commit downright murder. He would have been quite ready to fight his late intimate friend, Major

Shorthose, in any way that was honourable; but he considered that, under the existing conditions of English society and of English law, such a course was impracticable. How could he or Shorthose call upon their friends to run the terrible risks incurred by seconds, especially if either principal happened to be killed? And, if neither of the principals were killed, their professional prospects, to say nothing of the farce that would have been enacted, would be for ever ruined, which might be of no consequence to Shorthose but would be of the last importance to himself. Furthermore, he possessed a strong sense of justice, and that made him remember, and sad and bitter were his thoughts as he remembered, that love had soon begun to cool between Lurline and himself, after the first heyday of their wedded life was over, that the coolness had increased in spite of his endeavours, that she showed a marked preference for the society of other men above his own; and that, among those other men, she was at great pains to distinguish Shorthose, who, such was his gallantry and amiability, could not, and could not be expected to, repudiate the favours vouchsafed to him, or to incur the enmity which the *spretæ injuria formæ* proverbially inspires. Added to all this was a feeling of contempt, scarcely acknowledged but lurking in the gallant Captain's secret heart, a feeling akin to that which prompted the "gay cavalier" to exclaim in the song:

When a lady elopes down a ladder of ropes,
She may go to Hong Kong for me.

He swallowed what little breakfast he had stomach for, and then he drove to the Albany. Major Shorthose was in; and, as Captain Davies entered, the Major reared himself to his full height of six-feet-three, and stood waiting, apparently for the visitor to give a cue as to the conditions upon which they were to meet, though he exclaimed at once: "How are you, Davies? I rather expected you'd call."

"Yes; I've called on rather serious business," was the grave reply.

There was no hand-shaking; that was omitted as if by

mutual consent. Captain Davies remained standing near the door.

"Won't you sit down?" said Major Shorthose politely, as he seated himself.

Captain Davies sat down.

"I've come to you for an explanation, Shorthose," he said sternly: "though I hardly know how any explanation can be given. I have reason to believe that my—my wife is at Rosebank."

"Yes, I believe she is," replied the Major quietly, looking Captain Davies full in the face: "on a visit to my sister, Lady Stapleton. At any rate, she was expected last night."

Captain Davies with some difficulty preserved his calmness. He even forced a laugh.

"You will understand my behaviour, Shorthose," he rejoined, "when I tell you that my wife merely left word last night that she had gone somewhere, not saying where; that I only discovered by accident, this morning, when Hurley came to my house for her things, that she was at Rosebank; and that I had reason to believe that neither Lady Stapleton nor any other relation of yours was staying there."

"It's very curious," remarked Major Shorthose, with a smile: "my sister was there on purpose to receive Mrs. Davies; and when I said, on your coming in, that I rather expected you would call, you will naturally guess what my reason was. I thought you had come on purpose to tell me whether Mrs. Davies had carried out her plan. She distinctly said that you would not go with her; and she left it uncertain whether she would go herself."

"I never even heard a word about it," replied Captain Davies with an air of astonishment; "and, as I have told you, I didn't even know that Lady Stapleton was there."

"I could see by your manner, when you came in," observed Major Shorthose, "that there was something wrong, and so I thought I had better keep my distance, as you kept yours, until I had heard what it all meant. But now, will you come down with me this evening and dine with us at Rosebank? There will be two or three friends of my sister's."

Captain Davies hesitated; at last he answered: "Not to-day, thank you; I have an engagement."

"Well, come early to-morrow, or any other day you please, whilst Mrs. Davies is with my sister. She is going to stay a few days, I hope. As for me, I am going abroad on Tuesday."

"Abroad! What, at this time of the year?"

"Yes; I'm going to Germany all in a hurry. I expect to be abroad several months, or perhaps a whole year. I'm so pressed for time that I can't stay at Rosebank; I shall drive up again this evening, or rather, late at night, to town. You had better put off your engagement, if you can, and come with me."

"I can't, Shorthose; and I am so very busy just now, what with the settling on Ascot and other matters, that I doubt whether I shall be able to get to Rosebank at all before my wife comes home. So I must say good-bye,"

He rose from his chair and held out his hand, which Major Shorthose shook warmly, saying:

"Good-bye, Davies, good-bye. Any message for Rosebank?"

"No, thank you, none," was the answer, given in a dreamy sort of way.

"I hope you are satisfied with my explanation?" said Major Shorthose with a laugh.

"Perfectly," replied Captain Davies frankly; "it has relieved me," he added with a smile, "from a very unpleasant dilemma."

"How?"

"Well, I hope I am not a jealous fool," answered Captain Davies a little bitterly, "but as my wife did not think it worth while to give me any explanation, if you had been unable to give any, the whole business would have looked so curious that I might have felt that my only alternatives were to thrash you or fight you;" and he laughed uneasily.

Major Shorthose drew up his tall figure, squared his huge shoulders, and smiled pleasantly but not at all defiantly at Captain Davies, who continued:

"Oh! of course, the thrashing, which would have been the

more satisfactory alternative, was out of the question, and even the fighting is a devilish serious matter nowadays, especially for men in our profession."

"It is, by Gad! it's come to be almost an impossibility!" assented Major Shorthose sympathisingly; "and to my mind that is an additional reason why a gentleman should be more careful than ever not to do an injury for which he can only atone with his life or at the risk of it."

"And there are always a lot of asses," remarked Captain Davies, "who think that, if a man doesn't fight, it is because he is afraid."

"You, at any rate, could afford to despise *that* sort of opinion, Davies," observed Major Shorthose respectfully.

Captain Davies flushed slightly with pleasure at the evidently honest acknowledgment, and with another shake of the hand the two friends parted.

Nevertheless, Captain Davies still felt bewildered, as he strolled to his club. His wife's words had been very explicit, and had placed a barrier between them for ever. There was a mystery somewhere.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE KNIGHT AND THE LADY : BROTHER AND SISTER.

MAJOR SHORTHOSE drove down to Rosebank, and so timed his arrival that the ladies were dressing for dinner when he entered the house, and, as he himself went at once to his own room to dress, he so contrived matters that the company were all assembled when he made his appearance in the drawing-room. Mrs. Davies, arrayed most bewitchingly, and lovelier to look upon than the creature of a Mussulman's dream, was conversing gaily with the guests. The few words in which he thanked her for her kind visit to his sister at Rosebank were so coolly, easily, deferentially spoken that the slight flutter with which she had awaited his address was completely dispelled, and in her secret heart she almost fancied that the letter she had written him had not conveyed the meaning it might have seemed to convey to the great, handsome, good-natured booby. Besides, as Lady Stapleton had no doubt been in the house when the letter arrived, it might have appeared to have been sent in full knowledge of that fact and of the opportunity so offered; and neither Major Shorthose nor Lady Stapleton, knowing Lurline and her scorn for small conventionalities, would have been surprised at her writing to the brother and proprietor and actual giver of the invitation rather than to the sister and temporary mistress of the house. At any rate nobody had shown the slightest suspicion of any other state of affairs; and Mrs. Davies began to feel that, if it were not for the few lines she had left for her husband, she might regard the whole matter as a mad freak, to which she

had been impelled in a fit of momentary aberration, and from the irremediable consequences of which she had been rescued by a most fortunate combination of circumstances. And surely she had wits enough to laugh away any impression that might have been left upon the mind of Captain Davies by those fatal lines, which she could explain away on the ground that she had been playing a practical joke upon him to show him how much she disliked his plan of going to India, and to try and turn him from the project. At the same time she could not help feeling intermittent misgivings about her situation; and, now and then she was moved by mingled sentiments of hatred and rage, contempt and shame, as the possibility occurred to her that her real intentions had been perfectly well understood and deliberately ignored by that handsome giant, that six-feet-three of self-contented, self-possessed good-nature, who had dangled at her skirts for so many months, and who, as she was quite aware, had by his conspicuous attentions caused his name to be mixed up with hers as her *cavalier servente*, insomuch that, when their names were not mentioned, they were, as her own ears and perceptions had led her to know, made the objects of much covert allusion under the style and title of "the knight and the lady."

The dinner went off exceedingly well. Major Shorthose and Mrs. Davies were not in such close proximity as to render their position constrained and irksome. He took in an old dowager of rank, who sat on one side of him and balanced another dowager of lesser rank but larger bulk on the other. There was but one other gentleman present, an old colonel, who sat on one side of Lady Stapleton and faced the fascinating Mrs. Davies, who had not only completely recovered her composure, but had gradually reached a pitch of unusual sprightliness. Conversation soon began to be incessant, and the Colonel set the ball rolling.

"Captain Davies quite well, I hope," he said, bowing to Mrs. Davies.

"I hope so, I'm sure," she answered, laughing saucily; "but I really know nothing about him. I ran away from him last night, and I don't know how he will take it."

"Broken his heart, poor man, no doubt," rejoined the Colonel, with mock solemnity; "but he knows you are in good hands."

"Would you believe it?" said she archly, "I never told him where I was going."

"Oh Mrs. Davies!" exclaimed the two dowagers together, whilst the old colonel laughed even to coughing at the excellence of the jest.

"I am happy to assure Mrs. Davies," said the clear, calm, manly voice of Major Shorthose, "that Captain Davies, whom I had the pleasure of seeing this morning, is quite well, and quite aware that she is with my sister at Rosebank. I tried to persuade him to come down with me to-day, but he was unfortunately engaged."

Lady Stapleton, who had flushed and turned pale all in a moment during this dialogue, but recovered herself immediately, touched her glass, as a sign for a servant to carry round champagne, a sign which was obeyed with alacrity by the watchful Hurley. Mrs. Davies was the first whose glass was filled, and she thus had an opportunity for turning her head aside and concealing a slight tremor, as she rejoined with vivacity:

"That's not fair, Major Shorthose; you have spoilt my scheme. You should never interfere between man and wife."

"But how was John to know," observed Lady Stapleton merrily, "what a mad thing you are? I daresay," she added, with a furtive look at her brother, "that John went straight to Captain Davies this morning to ask whether you were here."

"No, I didn't," replied Major Shorthose coolly; "Davies came to me, before I went out, to tell me that Mrs. Davies had done us the honour of paying a visit to Rosebank."

"And pray how did he know?" inquired Mrs. Davies, with a defiant pout.

The two dowagers looked at one another, and laughed a laugh of half-amusement and half-derision.

"Oh," said Major Shorthose carelessly, "he had seen Hurley, and questioned him."

"It's very provoking," remarked Mrs. Davies discon-

tentedly, "to have one's plans upset in this way. I meant to give him a good fright."

"I should think you succeeded in that, Mrs. Davies," tittered one of the dowagers, "if you left the poor man in the dark until this morning."

"Oh, he's not so easily frightened," observed Mrs. Davies languidly.

"No, I shouldn't say Captain Davies was easily frightened," said the old colonel emphatically; "far more likely to frighten other people. What do *you* say, Shorthose?"

"I should say, very probably," answered Major Shorthose.

"Would *you* be afraid of him, Major Shorthose?" asked Mrs. Davies demurely.

"Well," replied he, with a pleasant smile, "I should be as much afraid of Captain Davies as of any man alive."

Mrs. Davies shot one furtive but penetrating glance at him, and then murmured softly, turning towards Lady Stapleton:

"I shouldn't have thought Major Shorthose would be afraid of anybody or anything."

"I'm *sure* he wouldn't be afraid of any *body*," said Lady Stapleton proudly; "but I can't say the same about any *thing*."

"Is he afraid of bogies?" asked Mrs. Davies slyly, and in a half-whisper.

"He is afraid of what some people seem to regard as bogies," answered Lady Stapleton, in the like half-whisper, but with a kind winning smile; "he is afraid of dishonour, disloyalty, disgrace, disguise; and he wouldn't do anybody an irreparable injury for the world."

"So I should imagine," rejoined Mrs. Davies, in a peculiar tone, adding, in very low tones, so that only Lady Stapleton could distinctly hear: "what a knight he would have made for the Round Table—as majestic as Sir Launcelot, and as stainless as Sir Galahad!"

Lady Stapleton fancied she could detect a covert sneer in the accent with which Mrs. Davies spoke, but the speaker's fair face expressed nothing but admiration as she turned, with a slight start, from Lady Stapleton, and looked towards

Major Shorthose, who had just replied, in answer to a question :

"Yes, Ehrenbreitstein ; I've been there a number of times. I have a great many friends in the neighbourhood."

"And when do you start ?"

"On Tuesday."

Mrs. Davies looked extremely interested.

"Do you stay long ?" inquired one of the dowagers, addressing Major Shorthose.

"Several months, at any rate," was the answer ; "and possibly a year or more."

"Do you like the Germans ?"

"Very much indeed ; they are not only an honest, sterling, sensible, frugal, industrious, well-educated people, but their nobles and gentry are, with the exception (if patriotism and politeness require me to say so) of our own, the best born, the best bred, and the most chivalrous of mankind ; they are as much superior in those respects to the French, as the Bank of England is to a whited sepulchre, and, though Mein Herr may not be quite so dapper and supple and brilliant as Monsieur, he has plenty of exterior polish too. A real German gentleman is very hard to beat, if not to match ; he is so very chivalrous."

Mrs. Davies looked at the old colonel with such a singular expression and smile that he addressed her, saying :

"You have no great opinion of the Germans, Mrs. Davies ?"

"I certainly very much prefer the French," answered Mrs. Davies, laughing ; "I can speak their language and I like their manners. But I am really no judge of Germans ; I have met very few ; and I don't even attempt to speak their language for fear of some accident to my throat. From the little I *do* know of them I should say that the men were horrid—not at all *my* ideal of the chivalrous. *That* notion, however, I have gathered rather from reading than from personal experience."

"May I ask for a specimen of what you have read, Mrs. Davies ?" said Major Shorthose deferentially.

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Davies without hesitation ; "it

was only the other day that I was reading a poem by a person named Schiller, I think; but Major Shorthose will be sure to know."

"I should think it very likely *was* Schiller," he rejoined smiling; "he is perhaps the noblest of all the German poets, not excepting Goethe. There is something so particularly grand and knightly, so to speak, about Schiller."

"Oh! dear," exclaimed Mrs. Davies ruefully; "and I thought what a clown either the poet or the creature he introduces into his poem must have been!"

"What was the poem called?" inquired Major Shorthose.

"Don't expect me to pronounce the dreadful word in the original," she answered; "but I can tell you what it means in English: the Hand-shoe—ha! ha! ha! Fancy calling a lady's glove a hand-shoe! I wonder they did not call her hand some sort of hoof, or paw."

"Do you know," said Major Shorthose, "it seems to me, on the contrary, rather a happy combination, such as German is famous for. And I'm sure Mrs. Davies is the last person in the world who ought to see anything ugly in shoes: she must so often have opportunities of convincing herself to the contrary." (Here Mrs. Davies bowed her acknowledgments.) "Now shoes, as a covering for the feet, would certainly be invented before gloves, as a covering for the hands; and as 'schuh' originally meant, I should say, nothing more than 'covering' or 'protection,' I can't help thinking that it was not only natural but logical, and even rather elegant too, to adopt the compound word which has unfortunately fallen under Mrs. Davies's displeasure. Perhaps I might also be permitted to observe that the use to which a thing is put very often affects the term expressing it, so that what is really no worse-sounding a word than many a one that would be chosen as euphonious, appears hideous simply from association. It is what a shoe goes through that, as it seems to me, causes the word 'hand-shoe' to sound harsh and incongruous. There is, to my ear and to my mind, nothing at all objectionable in the word itself, having regard to its original signification, even when applied to the most delicate gloves that were ever fitted

upon the fairest hands by a Houbigant or a Piver, or a Jouvin, or anybody else."

"Dear me!—Saul among the prophets—Major Shorthose among the philologers!" said Lady Stapleton, laughing and turning to the old colonel; "but you must know that John was brought up at Heidelberg."

"Ah!" rejoined the old colonel, who had been regarding Major Shorthose with undisguised astonishment, not to say consternation, "that accounts for it; I believe fellows who have been at German universities generally get into the way of it. It's different at the English universities; I've met men, in the army, who've been to Oxford and Cambridge and all that, and they didn't seem to have caught the knack of it at all."

"But, Mrs. Davies," said Lady Stapleton, "do go on: let us hear about the poem, if John's long dissertation hasn't put it all out of your head."

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Davies," observed Major Shorthose humbly, "for interrupting you; I recollect the poem perfectly."

"Then you must correct me if I make any mistakes," rejoined Mrs. Davies demurely. "According to my recollection, this is the story: A king gives an entertainment, consisting principally of a wild-beast-fight. Among the spectators are a knight and a lady, the knight, according to his own frequent statements on oath, being desperately in love with the lady, for whom he is not only ready but rather anxious to show his devotion by doing anything in the world, especially by exposing his life, shedding his blood, etc. etc., in the usual heroic style." (Here she shot one keen glance at Major Shorthose, who was listening attentively with his eyes cast down.) "It was all rubbish, no doubt. Well, a lion and a tiger are let out into the arena; and, whilst they are glaring and snarling at one another, and switching their tails, like little boys daring one another to fight, the lady drops her 'hand-shoe'—ha! ha!—(it was made of leather, I suppose) between the two furious creatures, and calls upon her dog—her knight, I mean—I beg his pardon—to 'go fetch,' if he

wishes to prove the sincerity of all he has sworn." (Here she darted another glance at Major Shorthose, who did not look up, though he had moved a little impatiently and frowned slightly.) "He at once stepped into the arena, picked up the 'hand-shoe,' and returned in a leisurely way (*gelassen-mässig* is the German word) to his place, amidst thunders of applause, of course. He walked up to the lady, who received him with such glances as told him all he had desired to know, and, growling out that he 'didn't want any thanks,' threw the 'hand-shoe' back in her face. A very chivalrous action, truly! Don't you think so, Major Shorthose?"

She asked the question in a tone of mingled archness and scorn, whilst a general murmur of disapprobation expressed the aggregate opinion of the company.

Major Shorthose looked up with a pleasant smile on his open, manly, handsome face, and answered at once:

"No, Mrs. Davies, I certainly do *not*. So much I will grant at once. But let me ask, first of all: are you sure it was a *German* knight? My impression is that his name was Delorges, which seems to me rather French than German; and I do not feel at all certain that the whole story is not French from beginning to end."

"Oh, Mrs. Davies!" was the general exclamation, and there was a general laugh at her expense. But she was not at all dismayed.

"At any rate the poet was a German, and the most knightly of all the German poets, as Major Shorthose declares," she pleaded boldly: "and he, of course, put into his poem just what he and his countrymen would be likely to say and think and do; and so he has not only betrayed his national boorishness, clownishness, and brutality, but he has added to his offensiveness by libelling the really gallant and knightly Frenchman."

"Allow me to ask, again, Mrs. Davies," said Major Shorthose, "whether the edition you read gave any other version of the knight's behaviour?"

"No, certainly not," she replied in astonishment; "why?"

"Because there are two different readings," answered

Major Shorthose quietly; "in some editions you might find

Und der Ritter sich tief verbeugend spricht,
instead of

Und er wirft ihr den Handschuh in's Gesicht,

and, in that case, I don't think you would find much to object to: he would simply have returned her her glove with a deep bow and requested her not to consider that any thanks were necessary. He would have been a little ironical, no doubt, but perhaps that was excusable under the circumstances."

"Which line appeared first?" asked Mrs. Davies eagerly.

"I can't say for certain," answered Major Shorthose, "but I *think* the line *you* read."

"Oh, then, it's quite clear," rejoined Mrs. Davies triumphantly; "somebody, most likely a Frenchman, who knew how a gallant knight would have borne himself, must have given the poet a hint."

"May it not have occurred to himself to alter it?"

"It *may*; but even then it would only show what the man's first and natural idea of a gentleman's conduct was."

"You are evidently prejudiced against the Germans. At any rate, you do not think theirs a good school of chivalry?"

"What a question!" exclaimed Mrs. Davies vivaciously, as she turned to the dowager, her neighbour: "when we have just heard where Major Shorthose went to college. I might be suspected of doubting *his* chivalry."

And she held up her hands in horror, but at the same time gave him such a look, short, quick, but wonderfully expressive, as might have made him feel uncomfortable, had not his attention been suddenly drawn in another direction.

"You surely don't defend the lady, Mrs. Davies," said one of the dowagers: "she never could have loved the knight to expose his life in that reckless, heartless, cruel, purposeless manner. She must have been a selfish, vain, unfeeling wretch."

"Well, I don't know," replied Mrs. Davies with an arch look and playful hesitation; "I think I could say something for her. I daresay the man had been bragging and boasting

of what he would do to win her; and she, more than half-inclined to love him, determined on the impulse of the moment to put him to the test in a manner which would leave her in no doubt as to his sincerity. Depend upon it, her heart was in her mouth the whole time; she suffered quite as much as he; and, had any harm come to him, she would have broken her heart. It was thoughtless, I allow: but impulse always is thoughtless; and all she desired at the moment was to convince herself of her power over him, and then to surrender her happiness to him without misgiving."

"But that was dreadfully selfish," objected the dowager; "besides, she might have been sure, if she had not been so vain, that it was to preserve his own reputation for bravery and for keeping his word that he performed the dangerous feat. It couldn't prove his love for her."

"But she showed her gratitude for his obedience in the best way she could. If she had really seemed to him so worth winning as he had, no doubt, been constantly assuring her she was, he would have been only too glad to take her, especially as he came to no harm, on her own terms. But he was, no doubt, one of your big talkers, profuse in expression but sorry to be taken at their word. He got off scot-free, and yet he was spiteful."

"The terms proved what a worthless woman she was. No honourable man would accept a woman on terms which proved her to be worthless."

"Well," said Mrs. Davies coolly, "I do not care to stand up any more for the lady; but I have a very mean opinion of the knight, especially if he threw the 'hand-shoe' in her face;" and she laughed, as she cast a furtive glance at Major Shorthose.

"In that case, I quite agree with you," said he gravely, and with a stiff bow.

The dinner was over, and, the night being so still and warm and light, it was agreed that coffee should be taken in the garden on the lawn. This arrangement gave Major Shorthose and the Colonel the chance of smoking their cigars; and, at the same time, of strolling about the grounds with such

of the ladies as did not object to the process of being smoked in the open air.

Thus an hour or so was passed pleasantly enough; and then the guests began to drop off one by one. Lady Stapleton was much engaged in all the little fuss that attends the departure of ladies; Major Shorthose remained in the garden. And so it happened that he was at last left alone with Mrs. Davies. It was getting late; but the night was so serene and cloudless, and the moon was so bright and clear, that it was scarcely darker than broad daylight.

"Major Shorthose," said Mrs. Davies suddenly, but in a cold, constrained voice, "I wrote so hurriedly the other day that I have almost forgotten what I said. If you have my note still, I should like to see it."

He made no reply in words, but at once produced the note in its envelope from a small pocket-book, and, having handed them to her with a grave bow, turned away to examine, apparently, the condition of a rose-tree near him.

She hastily read the note; her face flushed, and then grew pale. She replaced the note in the envelope, and put them in her pocket.

He had not watched her, he had not even looked at her, as she read; and he did not cease his occupation of smoking the rosebuds until he heard her voice.

"I shall keep this note," she said quietly. "It is a most absurd composition; I wonder you could understand it."

"I did my best," he replied deferentially, "and I hope I succeeded in having everything ready for your arrival. You left it doubtful whether you would come at all; or Mary would have called for you and driven you down, or would certainly have met you at the station."

"Lady Stapleton was kind enough to say so herself," rejoined Mrs. Davies coldly; "but there was really no occasion. I had no sort of trouble, and nothing could have been kinder than her reception of me."

Lady Stapleton now made her appearance on the lawn, exclaiming gaily:

"Quite a scene from 'The Merchant of Venice,' I declare!

Lorenzo and Jessica conversing together, and the moonlight sleeping on the bank. Shall I make strains of sweet music, to render the thing complete? Or shall we take another little stroll?"

"I think I shall stroll to bed, dear," said Mrs. Davies, rising from her seat beneath a noble tree, against the trunk of which Major Shorthose was leaning; "my head aches, and I feel a little tired. Good-night, Major Shorthose," she added, with a bend of her graceful head, as she turned towards the house.

"It must be 'good-bye,' I'm afraid, as well as 'good-night,'" said Major Shorthose, stepping to her side. "I shall not be here again before I leave for Germany on Tuesday."

She stopped and shook hands with him, saying languidly:

"Oh, then we shall not meet again for some time. Good-bye!"

And so she left him; and Lady Stapleton went with her, arm-in-arm, into the house. In a few minutes Lady Stapleton returned to her brother, who was lounging listlessly about the lawn and smoking, whilst his horses were being put to for the drive up to town. She slid her arm round his, and, looking anxiously up into his face, said:

"Well, John, shall we 'pull through,' as you men say?"

"My dear Mary," he answered affectionately, patting the hand that lay upon his arm, "you can't think how grateful I am to you. You have managed everything splendidly. I felt sure I might confide in you. I was in a dreadful fix, though. I had been treated with a confidence which I was bound, in honour, not to betray, if possible; and yet I was equally bound, in honour, to prevent what I couldn't prevent without betraying the confidence. However, I am quite certain that everything is safe with you."

"Quite, quite, John," she murmured, pressing his arm; "you may trust me as you would yourself."

"It is a subject I ought never to have even mentioned to you, Mary," he said ruefully.

"Stuff and nonsense!" she replied playfully; "there are some things too terrible to allow of one's standing on cere-

mony, and observing the little pruderies of conventionality. If I had been a mere unmarried girl, it might have been different; but, you know, I have all the privileges and experience of a widow."

Her voice trembled, and her eyes filled with tears as she spoke. Her brother stooped and kissed her, saying:

"God bless you, Mary! You have saved no end of people from no end of trouble. I can't bear to think what might have happened if I hadn't caught you before you had started for the North."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, shaking her head; "it was touch-and-go, as you men say. I do feel so thankful that you were not too late. But do you know, John, I really don't think that wild thing meant any harm; I quite believe that she merely meant to frighten Captain Davies, as she said. She could never have talked in that cool, brazen way at dinner if she had been conscious of anything *very* bad; she would have been too much overwhelmed with shame and confusion to rattle away as she did."

"The effect would have been all the same," replied Major Shorthose dryly, "if there had been no lady here to receive her; and upon my word, Mary, I quite shudder to think what might have been the consequences, if busybodies had got tattling, or, in fact, if you hadn't been here, to that gallant fellow, Davies, whom I wouldn't injure for the world, to Mrs. Davies, and to—to—all sorts of people."

"You never showed me her letter, John," said Lady Stapleton thoughtfully; "I should like to see it."

"I told you all that was necessary," observed her brother in a tone of indifference; "I haven't kept the letter, and so I can't show it you."

She gave him a keen, earnest look.

"You are not blameless, you know, John," she said in a tone of mild reproof.

"Indeed I am not," he answered penitently.

"You and Mrs. Davies," she continued, "had been talked about a great deal: so much, indeed, that I used to feel quite ashamed sometimes, when I couldn't help hearing what people

said. I do so wish, John," she went on plaintively, "you would marry : it is very wicked of you to flirt, as you do, with married women. I know you don't mean any real harm, but you have discovered for yourself what mischief you may make. If you had kept at a proper, respectful distance from Mrs. Davies, she would never have dreamt of playing off this mad trick of hers against her husband at the risk of getting us all into a dreadful scrape."

"My dear Mary," observed her brother didactically, "you don't know what a fool a man is when there is a pretty woman in the case; why——"

"Upon my word!" she interrupted, smiling archly: "I not know? Pray, what do you take *me* for? Have I had no experience, pray?"

"Well," he answered, looking at her admiringly; "you certainly might have if you had liked; but——"

"I know what you are going to say," she broke in: "a man doesn't know where to stop; and, if the woman doesn't give him a pretty strong hint, he may go plump into an abyss."

"Just so," he assented; "and I have to thank you, dear, that I was able to pull up on the brink."

"All's well that ends well, John," she said tenderly; "but you haven't told me how you managed matters with Captain Davies."

"Oh! he was perfectly satisfied," answered Major Short-hose, "as soon as he knew that Mrs. Davies was with *you*; but he was naturally surprised at her going away and coming down here without letting him know where she had gone."

"He didn't express any doubt?"

"Doubt?—oh no; Davies would no more think of doubting my word than I should of doubting his."

"Then I do hope, John, we may consider the matter satisfactorily settled. As long as Mrs. Davies chooses to stay here I will be a sister to her. But, John dear, don't think me unkind if I say that, though I would do anything in my power to help my brother out of a scrape, and to save one of my own sex from the tender mercies of a scandalous world, I do feel it goes rather against the grain whenever it occurs to me that she *may* have meant the very worst she could mean."

"You are something more than a Christian, Mary," said

Major Shorthose, embracing her affectionately; "you are an angel. Good-bye, darling, good-bye, and a thousand, thousand thanks!"

And so he mounted to the driving-seat of the trap which had been for some minutes waiting, and drove rapidly away; whilst Lady Stapleton stood at the gate and waved her handkerchief, with the tear-drops glistening in her gentle eyes.

At the sound of the wheels upon the gravel, and the click of the gate, thrown back to allow full room for exit, a white curtain at an upper window was pulled cautiously on one side, and the cold beams of the moon fell upon the fair hand that held the curtain, upon the fairer bosom, half-shielded by the arm connected with that hand, and upon a portion of a lovely face. That lovely face wore a frown upon the brow and a sneer upon the lips; and, as the noise of the receding wheels grew fainter and fainter, the owner of the lovely face, letting the curtain drop into its place, sank down upon a couch with an open letter in her hand, muttering:

"The contemptible, great coward! I do believe he was afraid of my little husband. The body of a Hercules and the heart of a butterfly! A gigantic he-flirt, as aimless and as purposeless as a giddy girl or a silly moth! Well, I shall be wiser for the future. I'll write no more letters of this kind; and I'll remember that a man may be a gentleman—a nobleman, in fact—a soldier, and six-feet-three, and, at the same time, a liar, a braggart, and a coward!"

Then she folded the open letter up, and laid it beside its envelope upon the writing-table, close by the couch. Then she wrote a second letter, and addressed a second envelope, and, having folded up the letter, she laid it and its envelope side by side with the first. She had needed no light but the moonlight for her occupation. After this she sat and pondered; and gradually she grew drowsy and nodded. But she determined to finish her work before she went to rest. She roused herself with an effort, took up the letters dreamily, put them into the envelopes mechanically, and, having fastened one up and left the other open, she slipped the latter, addressed to Major Shorthose, into her dressing-case, and fell asleep like Innocence.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HUSBAND AND WIFE, AND A SCRAP OF PAPER.

MRS. DAVIES did not make a long stay at Rosebank. She did not remain even for the "week at least" upon which Lady Stapleton had insisted. She began to feel uneasy—as uneasy as it was in her nature to feel at all—about her situation and about the reception she might expect from her husband. She had written to him on that very Sunday night after she had recovered her note from Major Shorthose—the note in which she had invited herself to Rosebank. We have seen how she slipped into her dressing-case the envelope, with its contents, addressed to Major Shorthose; and the other envelope, with its contents, addressed to Captain Davies, she had sent to the post at the earliest possible moment on the Monday morning. In her letter to her husband she had laughed away, as she imagined, any misgivings which the paper she had left for him might have caused to still linger in his mind, even after he had discovered how little there was to be alarmed at in her sudden disappearance from home. She had requested him to write or to come in person to Rosebank; but he neither wrote nor came.

She had convinced herself, at croquet-parties and little extemporised gatherings of all kinds, that no whisper of scandal had reached Lady Stapleton's friends, whose conduct would otherwise have been very different from what it was: there was no cold shoulder, no glassy stare, no pointed avoidance, no significant behaviour whatever. Wherever Lady

Stapleton took her she was received with open arms. Still Captain Davies did not come or write; and, when Thursday arrived without any appearance of a letter or of himself, she determined to go home.

"Shall I write to the obstinate man?" Lady Stapleton had asked at breakfast; "he will be bound in mere politeness to answer *me*, you know."

"No, thank you, dear Lady Stapleton," Mrs. Davies had replied; "I think I will go home, please; I begin to be afraid there is something wrong somewhere."

"Then I shall drive you up after luncheon, if you really will go," Lady Stapleton had said.

And so it was arranged.

About four o'clock the two ladies arrived at Notting Hill. Of course Captain Davies was not at home. Where was he? Did the servant know? The servant believed that he had gone to his club. Well, then, Mrs. Davies should have her things taken out of the carriage, and should then drive round with Lady Stapleton to the club.

"I want to see the obstinate man, dear," said Lady Stapleton, "to tell him how badly he has behaved; we'll draw him first, dear, from his hole in the club, and then we'll bait him."

So they drove to the club; and Lady Stapleton sent in her card. A minute or two elapsed, and Captain Davies appeared. He wore a look which his wife had only once or twice seen upon his face, and which effectually banished all Lady Stapleton's intentions of "baiting" him. He was deadly pale, his eyes had a cold, stern, determined look, with which the set of his mouth entirely corresponded; and, as he caught sight of his lovely wife, the expression of sternness grew more intense instead of fading away. He walked with quick, resolute steps up to the carriage, replying with a grave inclination of the head to his wife's smiles and hand-kissings, and saluting Lady Stapleton with his usual grace indeed but without relaxing a muscle of his face. Lady Stapleton remembered to have heard that he had been "very hard hit" at both Epsom and Ascot, and she attributed his appearance

and manner to the preoccupation arising therefrom. She could not help noticing, however, that, whatever the effect of his troubles might have been, they had not made him, as they would have made many men, either neglectful of his costume or feverish and nervous. He was dressed to perfection, and he had never been more admirably cool and collected, noticeable as he generally was for his cool and collected air.

"I have to thank you for taking care of my wife, Lady Stapleton," he said politely but coldly.

"You see I have brought her back again, quite safe and sound," she replied smiling; "and now we have come to fetch you home to your own house to five o'clock tea. So jump in, like a good man, and come with us."

He took his place in the carriage without a word, and they drove off to Notting Hill.

"You got my note, I suppose, George?" asked Mrs. Davies, as soon as they started.

He looked at her blankly for a few seconds, and then answered quietly and very coldly:

"Oh! yes. I got your note."

"Then why didn't you write, or come?" she asked with a pout.

Again he looked at her blankly for a few seconds, but made no reply. He even turned his head away from her towards Lady Stapleton, who said:

"You really ought to have written or come, Captain Davies; you have cut your wife's visit short. She became quite fidgety at not hearing from you, and determined to return home to-day."

"Oh! then she is not going back to Rosebank?" rejoined Captain Davies, addressing Lady Stapleton and ignoring his wife.

"Of course I'm not, silly," said Mrs. Davies, tapping him playfully with her fan; "I have come home to look after you."

Captain Davies did not even glance at her; and Lady Stapleton saw that there was something wrong, which she

could not reconcile with what her brother had told her about the explanation with which Captain Davies had been "perfectly satisfied." She began to feel a little uncomfortable, and it was not without a slight tremor that she asked :

"Did you see my brother before he went, Captain Davies ?"

"Oh ! yes," was the answer, given in an absent sort of way, "we had a long conversation. I was with him for more than two hours."

"You had something very serious to talk of then, I should say," she remarked with a timid attempt at sprightliness.

"Yes, we had," he admitted gravely.

And they drove on in almost complete silence, broken only by a few remarks as they met and bowed to an occasional acquaintance.

Notting Hill was reached in good time. The five o'clock tea was enlivened by a few visitors who dropped in and kept the ball of conversation rolling gaily. One by one they departed ; and, when Lady Stapleton had driven away, the husband and wife were alone.

"Lurline," said he, in a tone to which she was but little accustomed, "I wish you would come into my room : I will wait for you there ; I want to show you something."

And he went away to the little room which served him for what is commonly called a study.

In a few minutes she followed him, wondering greatly what could be the meaning of the tone in which he had spoken to her, a tone which he had adopted but once or twice during their married life, which had always convinced her that she had gone beyond the limits of his forbearance, and which had never failed, somehow or other, to make her feel that he was not to be trifled with.

"Now then, George, what is this wonderful thing"—she began in her liveliest manner, but the words died away on her lips and her liveliness vanished like a breath, as she observed the expression upon his face and saw him lock the door, as soon as she had seated herself.

"What ever is the matter ?" she exclaimed, as he sat down opposite to her, with his writing-table between them. "Oh !"

she whimpered, in a sudden fit of fear, "you wouldn't hurt me, George?"

"I wouldn't hurt a hair of your head; I wouldn't even hurt your feelings, Lurley," he answered gently, "for all the world, if I could help it; I only locked the door for fear of interruption."

She gazed at him doubtfully; and, seeing the gentle look, which had accompanied the gentle tone, succeeded once more by such an expression as a man might wear who had hardened his heart and made up his mind for anything and everything, she sprang with a wild, frightened look from her chair and darted towards the bell, moaning:

"Don't look like that; you mean something dreadful."

Captain Davies stepped calmly between her and the bell-rope, saying quietly, and even contemptuously:

"Now, do listen a moment, Lurline, before you make an absurd scene and set all the servants talking nonsense; ring the bell, if you like, by all means, but think what order you will give before you do; I will unlock the door, if you please, at once, but you know that I always lock it when I have any private business with anybody, because the servants are in the habit of leaving all sorts of things here and looking in for them at all sorts of times. Do be reasonable, pray."

And he smiled, but with a sad and a flitting smile.

She went back to her seat reluctantly, shaking her head and saying petulantly:

"Very well; just as you please, but you do look so cruel, George, that I declare I don't half like it. Now then, what have you to show me?"

"I've been very busy, Lurline, since you have been away," he replied: "first of all I want to show you—this."

He handed her a newspaper, the evening newspaper dated that very day, and pointed to a short paragraph, rendered conspicuous by a large cross set against it in ink.

"Well!" she said sullenly, having read it; "is that all? I see you are gazetted; but I tell you once more, *I will not go to India.*"

His face grew, if possible, sterner and more determined, as

he took back the newspaper, and pulling out of a drawer in his writing-table a curious-looking blue paper, held it out to her, saying :

"Then, perhaps, you will have the less objection to sign—this."

She snatched it out of his hand, and, having glanced over it with eyes that opened wider and wider and glared more and more wildly, whilst her hands shook more and more nervously as she read, she suddenly dashed it upon the ground, exclaiming :

"A deed of separation ! What do you mean by this insult, George ? What have I done to deserve this ?"

"Is it possible," asked Captain Davies, with cool surprise, "that you have forgotten the paper you left for me when you went away on Saturday ?"

"Didn't I write to you ?" she replied vehemently, with the tears in her eyes, "from Rosebank, to explain to you that it was all a joke on my part, to punish you for insisting upon going to India ?"

"Did—you, Lurline ?" he asked slowly and sternly ; "it would have been rather a heartless joke, even if you did."

"If I did !" she cried passionately ; "why, where is the note you received from me ?"

"That is another thing I wanted to show you," he answered in a hollow voice, as he held out to her a note addressed in her handwriting to him ; "that is the note I received from you."

She snatched it from him and tore it open. He turned his back towards her ; he would not watch her or seem to triumph over her. She uttered one exclamation of horror, as she dropped the note into her lap, and then all was silent. She sat staring at the note, as if it fascinated her, where it lay ; all the colour had left her lips, and her hands hung listlessly down on either side. He sat with his head turned from her and his bodily eyes fixed vacantly upon the wall, whilst his mental vision was occupied with a picture of sweet memories, bitter realities, a loveless and a hopeless future. Thus they sat for a minute or two. Suddenly she rose, taking

the note with her, and walked to the door. She rattled the handle impatiently; she could not or would not speak to him. He went and unlocked the door for her, she passed out without the interchange of a syllable between them, and tottered upstairs to her own room.

He picked up the deed of separation and returned it to the drawer whence he had taken it. Then he walked thoughtfully up and down his little room, until a servant came to say that dinner was ready, but that Mrs. Davies did not feel quite well and would not come down. So he dined, as far as he could be said to dine at all, alone; and after dinner he retired to his own little room to smoke.

After a while came to his door the French maid, whose duty it was to play the three Graces to the Venus of Mrs. Davies, and who came to Captain Davies with not unexpected information, combined with an apology for intruding upon him.

"Pardon, monsieur; Madame se trouve mal; elle vous demande, s'il vous plaît."

Captain Davies intimated that he would obey the summons as soon as he had finished his cigar. When that moment had arrived, he once more took the deed of separation from the drawer, and having put it in his pocket, ascended the staircase and entered his wife's room. Mrs. Davies had never looked more bewitching. She was still very pale, and still showed traces of recent emotion; but that only made her more interesting and not a whit the less lovely. She was reclining upon a couch, in her dressing-gown—white trimmed with light blue, open at the bosom and the sleeves, so that the beauties of her bust and of her shapely arms and slender hands were displayed to the best advantage; and her luxuriant hair, brushed back from her forehead and intertwined with a cunningly-arranged binding of light blue ribands, rested upon her shoulders, and fell down behind in waves, and curves, and twisted masses, marvellous to see. On a little table, hard by the couch, stood a silver lamp with a green shade and a glass flower-stand laden with roses, from the midst of which played a fountain of clear water, making a

pleasant murmur and preserving a refreshing coolness, though the evening was sultry and oppressive.

"Thank you for coming, George," she said in a melancholy voice, as her husband seated himself in the low chair placed ready near the head of the couch. "I want to speak to you."

"I'm quite ready to listen, Lurline," he replied coldly.

"That's the note I intended to send you, George," she said timidly, handing him the note he had not received. "I was very sleepy when I had finished writing on Sunday night, and somehow, hardly knowing what I did, I put the wrong note in the envelope."

He took the letter she proffered him, read it through, and pitched it discontentedly upon the little table, saying:

"That might have been all very well; but what use is it now, when I've seen the other note?"

"I was going to explain, dear," she answered submissively. "I was so overwhelmed when you showed me the letter downstairs that I couldn't say a word; but now I will tell you all about it. Don't be hard upon me, George," she added coaxingly, putting her arm timidly round his neck, and drawing his head on to her shoulder.

He did not resist, and, when she pressed her lips upon his forehead, he sighed and muttered:

"I hard upon you! You ought to know me better."

"Now look here, George," she went on, gaining courage; "don't interrupt me. Suppose I tell you that it was all a plot between Major Shorthose, Lady Stapleton, and myself, to show you how much I detested your plan of going to India; that the strain in which I wrote to Major Shorthose was only for the purpose of keeping up our little comedy, and really meant nothing, as you may conclude from his giving me my letter back, on purpose that I might show it to you when the proper time came; and that, if you hadn't frightened me by taking everything so very seriously, and if that unlucky mistake of mine in sending the wrong letter had not occurred, completely unnerving me for the moment, I had intended to hide nothing from you, not even the letter, over which we should have had a good laugh afterwards—what would you say to that?"

And, as she concluded, she put both arms round his neck, turned his face round towards her, and bent her liquid eyes most imploringly upon his.

But he shook himself free, started to his feet, and, with a look as black as thunder, answered :

“ I should say it was a—it was impossible.”

“ Im-possi-ble !” she murmured faintly.

“ Yes, impossible,” he replied fiercely ; “ and I should say so, even if you hadn’t been growing colder and colder towards me for many a long day, Lurline. Do you think I haven’t senses, eyes, and ears, and all the rest of it ? Your whole conduct, and especially your behaviour when I gave you that letter, would make the thing impossible. Besides, I have proof of the impossibility.”

“ What do you mean ?”

“ I mean this. As soon as I saw that that odious letter was not intended for me, I took it to the man for whom it had been intended, and from him I learnt everything I wanted to know.”

“ The contemptible great coward !” exclaimed Mrs. Davies passionately, unable to control her feelings.

“ That remark is quite enough to condemn you,” said Captain Davies ; “ but you are quite mistaken. Shorthose is no more a coward than I am ; and nobody ever accused me of being *that*. Don’t suppose that I discovered from him anything that the most gallant gentleman could have kept me from discovering. You have only your own carelessness to thank for your exposure. If that note had not come into my hands, the explanation I received from Shorthose of your visit to Lady Stapleton at Rosebank would have been sufficient to shield you, even after the announcement you were considerate enough to leave behind for me. And even when I took Shorthose that precious letter of yours, it was only by his first instantaneous change of countenance that I gained the information which I required, and from which I conclude that your account is impossible. He evidently had no idea that the letter was to have been shown to me, although he persisted in putting upon it that generous interpretation upon which he

acted. You did not know Shorthose so well as I did. Of course I was not pleased at the way in which you encouraged him, or at the way in which he availed himself of your encouragement, or at the way in which I could not help being aware that your names were coupled together; but the part of the jealous husband, especially when his wife repulses him, is a thankless and a foolish one to play, and I comforted myself with the reflection that, for all his reckless gaiety and wild talking, Shorthose was the man I could best trust not to do a friend an irreparable injury, and not to compromise a woman beyond redemption. And I was right. Though I talked with Shorthose for more than two hours, I did not hear him utter one single syllable, Lurline, which could lead me to suppose that he put the interpretation which I and any husband would put upon that dreadful letter; but, nevertheless, from the answers he could not avoid giving to my questions, I found out quite enough to feel sure that you and I have been saved from a terrible scandal by rapid and combined action between Shorthose and Lady Stapleton. I elicited that she herself did not arrive at Rosebank until a few hours before your own arrival; and that, in order to receive you, she had given up a visit which she was to have paid, as I remembered to have heard, to some friends in the North. But though, no thanks to ourselves, we have been preserved from a public scandal, it is quite certain that you and I cannot continue to live together; and therefore," he added, taking the deed of separation out of his pocket and tapping the paper, "I have had this deed drawn up. I shall soon start for India, and that will give us a good opportunity of commencing our separation without any fuss. Will you sign?"

"What have I done?" asked Mrs. Davies petulantly. "I have done nothing wrong; I have only spent a few days with Lady Stapleton at Rosebank."

"A *coup manqué*," muttered Captain Davies bitterly; "besides," he added more loudly, "you forget the paper you left for me, and that note," pointing to the letter she had written to Major Shorthose; "there can never be any confidence between us after those."

"I tell you it was all a scheme to try you and punish you," she burst out vehemently.

He shook his head incredulously, seating himself once more in the low chair beside her couch.

Almost mechanically she took the two notes, and, setting fire to them in the flame of the lamp, put them in a plate which was upon the table, and watched them consuming away.

Captain Davies at the same time took from his pocket a scrap of paper, which she recognised at once as the piece upon which she had written the announcement of her departure; he lighted it in the flame of the lamp and, adding it to the little heap in the plate, murmured:

"Ashes to ashes: let us bury the whole business."

She thought she understood him, and flung herself upon his breast, sobbing:

"Then you *will* forgive me, George? I've been very foolish."

There was no answer; only her hands were unfastened from his neck, and she was gently thrust away from him. She sank down upon the floor and clasped his knees:

"Didn't you say: bury the business?" she faltered.

"I didn't say: bury the memory of it," was the stern reply; "and my remark only applied to outward and visible signs."

"Then you will not forgive me?"

No reply.

"George! George! Pray, forgive me, if you *ever* loved me."

No reply.

"George! George! Pray, answer: say that you forgive me."

Captain Davies extricated himself gently from her grasp, and rose to his feet, whilst she returned to her couch, moaning:

"Pray, pray forgive me."

He strode hastily once or twice up and down the room, without answering; suddenly he stopped opposite to her and said:

"I would if I could, but I can't; and I hate a lie. If forgiveness means that I will bear you no malice, do you no evil, and take no revenge, then I forgive you freely; but if it means that bygones are to be bygones, that I am to love as I loved and trust as I trusted, and that we are to live together as we have lived hitherto, then I must tell you plainly that I can't do it. I shall never love anybody else, Lurley, as I have loved you; and perhaps that is the very reason why I could never feel towards you again as I have felt; I should always be haunted by suspicion, fearing that what has happened, and worse, might occur at any time. We shall never be happy together again, and so we had better part. You had better agree to sign that paper."

"And suppose I refuse to sign it?" asked Mrs. Davies sulkily.

"Well," replied her husband quietly, "as I am soon going to India and you are not, it will make very little difference; only you will not find things made so easy for you in my absence as they are made in the deed, by which you will have at your sole disposal everything that at present belongs to us jointly, everything, that is, except a portion of the little money I had at the time of our marriage."

"You spend my money, and then you throw me off," sneered Mrs. Davies, as she perused the deed.

Her husband shrugged his shoulders, but made no reply. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"When do you wish me to sign this thing? Now?"

"No, not now: it will have to be copied, and our signatures will have to be witnessed, and probably more formalities will have to be gone through; that paper is only a rough copy for your approval."

"My approval!" she exclaimed with a sneer; "however," she added wearily, "I suppose I may as well sign it; and the sooner the better."

"That is understood then," observed Captain Davies, as he took up the document; "I will see Mr. Tribe and have everything got ready."

And so, without any salutation he left Mrs. Davies to

herself. Nor was she by any means so distraught and disconsolate as might have been expected under the circumstances. She had found balm in Gilead; she had discovered from her perusal of the deed that her personal freedom and independence would be almost unlimited, and that great pains had been taken to secure to her for her sole and individual use nearly every farthing that would be left from the wreck of what she and her husband had possessed. The question which interested her chiefly was, how many pounds sterling per annum those farthings would amount to.

That same eventful evening Lady Stapleton, on returning to Rosebank, found a letter from her brother; and thus it ran :

“Cologne : Hôtel Belle Vue.

“MY DEAREST MARY,

“I travelled right through to this place; and, after a little rest and a little time to collect my thoughts and arrange my ruffled plumage and feelings, which *both*, I can assure you, required arrangement, I have taken the earliest opportunity of writing to you upon the subject which has been, and for some time will be, uppermost in my mind. I am very much afraid, my dear Mary, that, notwithstanding your most kind, sisterly, charitable, and clever co-operation, we have not been quite so successful as we imagined in the ‘*affair Davies*.’ We have succeeded in preventing the world from having a delightful topic of conversation, such as it might have had if we had not put our heads together and transformed the extraordinary freak of a certain fair lady, whom I need not more particularly specify and who has small regard for conventionalities when they interfere with the indulgence of her wildest whims, into the most ordinary case of a visit paid by one lady to another at a suburban villa; but I have excellent, far too excellent, reasons for believing that the scarcely less important purpose of not only maintaining the *status quo ante*, but establishing an *entente cordiale* between the ‘high contracting parties,’ to wit, M. le Capitaine and Madame la Sirène, has been defeated in the most mysterious manner.

"Don't be angry with me, dear Mary, if I seem to adopt a tone of inopportune levity; it is sometimes absolutely necessary to relieve a heavy heart by an assumption of unfelt lightness, lest the burden should become too oppressive. Let me tell you everything; everything, at least, which is necessary to comprehend the position, for you have earned a right to as complete confidence as I should be justified in according to any human being.

"You may recollect that you requested to see the letter in which Madame had expressed her intention of honouring Rosebank with a visit; and I told you that I could not show it you, as I had not kept it. That was quite true. But I had not destroyed it; and with that very letter in his hand M. le Capitaine called upon me about mid-day on Monday. You might have knocked me down with a feather; for, though the letter was quite capable of the construction which I, and you, from the account I gave you of it, decided that we must place upon it, yet I could not conceal from myself that, as you also had clearly seen from the bare summary I had given you of the contents, it was open to another construction. This construction M. le Capitaine, notwithstanding all my arguments, based upon literal interpretation and strengthened by the evidence of facts, had plainly made up his mind to adopt, although he expressed no opinion upon the point. I couldn't, of course, deny that I had received the letter; for, even if anything in the world would induce me to lie, he might have had, for all I knew, proof that I had received it and my denial would have been all he required to confirm him in his own interpretation. Besides, my denial would not have exonerated Madame from having written it; and, as he had no doubt whatever of that, all I had to do was to try and convince him that there was nothing in it.

"He was naturally very cautious as to what he said upon so delicate a matter. He confined himself chiefly to asking such questions as, under the circumstances, he had a perfect right to ask, and such as I could not refuse to answer as readily and straightforwardly as possible; the slightest hesitation on my part would, as you will at once see, have

made things ten thousand times worse, and would have rendered him doubly suspicious. 'You received that letter from my wife?' was the first thing he said. At the sight of it I was so surprised that I could only bow assent, and say 'Certainly,' but I flatter myself that I kept my countenance indifferently well. How did he come by it? you will ask. There's the mystery. Of course my cue was to appear as indifferent as possible about it; and so, as soon as I had recovered my surprise, which, I hope, was very soon, I inquired carelessly where he had got it from. He astonished me very much by replying quietly: 'From my wife, to whom you returned it, I suppose, for some reason or other; it matters not what.' I told him at once that I did return it for the very simple reason that Mrs. Davies, having written it in a great hurry and in pursuance of her scheme, had not unnaturally felt a little doubtful about the exact expressions she had used, and, having asked me to allow her to refer to the letter to refresh her memory, had not given it to me back again; nor had I asked for it. That was why I hadn't it in my possession, Mary, when you wanted to see it; but I didn't think it worth while to give you a long explanation as to what had become of it.

"'I don't wonder at her feeling doubtful about some of the expressions,' he said bitterly; 'what sense would you attach to that—and that—and that?' and he pointed to certain passages. I at once replied that at any rate I, knowing the playful exaggeration in which Mrs. Davies indulged, had interpreted them in a different manner from that which he seemed disposed to adopt, as I hoped you and I had made evident by our conduct. I shall never forget the look he gave me, as he said: 'I wish I could see it as you do, Shorthose; but upon my soul I can't. You have given proof of your own loyalty, at any rate, by refusing to read as I should have read; and that is some consolation. I wish I could think that there was nothing but the playfulness which you seem to see in the terms used about me and about the pleasure of being rid of me; to my mind it is anything but playful. Things have come to such a pass between you and

me, that there would be only false pride in my retaining any reserve towards you, and keeping everything, as some men would, quite dark, and therefore I will tell you that, as I read this letter, as I read other signs which you know nothing about, and as I remember conduct on your part and on that of other men which has annoyed me at the time, though I was not going to make a laughing-stock of myself by behaving like a jealous idiot, I am not at all afraid that my wife is *in love* with you or any other man, I am only afraid that she is completely *out of love* with me. So that I don't feel exasperated against anybody, I only feel disconsolate about myself.'

"Then he asked all kinds of questions about *you*, and how long you had been at Rosebank, and the exact date of your arrival there, and why you hadn't gone to the North; and, although I think I could see the drift of his questions, I had the greatest difficulty in the world to avoid answering them so as to betray our little plot. I firmly believe that he obtained some inkling of it, do all I could to conceal it.

"He gave me a sad account of his losses. He hopes to be gazetted in a day or two and to go on active service in India. I asked him whether Mrs. Davies would go with him; and he answered most emphatically, 'No.' From his look and his tone I gathered that that unhappy letter had undone all the work that we had so laboriously (and skilfully on your part) patched up. He says he got the letter from his wife; but the mystery still remains as to *how* he got it. And I didn't think that I had any right to ask him. She may have sent it to him with a full explanation of the whole wild freak, in the hope of convincing him by such confidence and frankness that it *was* a mere freak, and may have 'reckoned without her host;' at any rate he is plainly offended *à outrance*.

"Find out the secret, explain the mystery to me, if you can, my dear Mary; and, in any case, I am sure that I can trust to you to extend your protective wing, to the best of your ability, over that beautiful young wife. The poor thing, I fear, will have poverty, or what to *her* is downright poverty, to contend with as well as other troubles. Pray, don't lose sight of her. As for M. le Capitaine, there is nothing to be

done but to sympathise with him, wish him a brilliant career in India, and pray for his promotion. Mit allen Grüßen,

“Zeichnet sich,

“Ihr ergebenster

“(as our old tutor used to write),

“JOHN SHORTHOSE.”

“Oh, dear me!” whimpered Lady Stapleton, fairly crying over her brother’s letter, “what ever is to be done? I do wish John had burnt that odious letter.” And then she thought: “I never saw it; but, for that very reason, I believe it was more odious and more compromising than I had supposed. Poor Captain Davies! and poor, thoughtless, careless Lurline! I really must try if I can’t heal the breach, and induce her to go to India with him. It will be the best thing for him and for her and for everybody concerned.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MR. AND MRS. TRIGGS AT HOME.

IF anybody asked Mr. Triggs where he lived, his favourite answer was that he lived "out Clapham way." This was indefinite, no doubt, but it generally had the desired effect of so far satisfying an inquirer as to stop any further inquiry, the result usually intended by those who make such replies and acquiesced in by those who elicit them. In point of fact, however, whosoever went from London to dine with Mr. and Mrs. Triggs did well to get out, if the journey were made by rail, at Balham station, whence ten minutes' walk or five minutes' jog in a fly, which couldn't go the short cut over a stile, brought the diner to the green gate which opened upon the yellow gravel which led up to the glass doors which let you into the hall, which had on one side the elegant drawing-room and on the other the commodious dining-room in which Mr. Thomas Triggs, citizen and Flounderer, with the assistance of his handsome, stately wife, dispensed an unexceptionable hospitality. The house was not of the Elizabethan order or of the Gothic order, or of any but what may be termed for lack of a better term the suburban order, by which it will be understood that, though it was a house which would not be generally sneezed at, still it was a house which would not lead a spectator to suppose that its architect was a modern Michael Angelo, or even a star of lesser magnitude. The house stood on the road to Epsom; and it was so situated that, on certain days of the year, its inmates and their visitors

had the privilege of seeing from the windows, without stirring out of the house, or, if they preferred to stir out of the house, from the midst of the lawn and garden, both exquisitely kept in trim, what some people consider the best part of Epsom races, namely, the continuous stream of vehicles, the bonnets and dresses (or the umbrellas, according to the weather), the white coats, white hats, and blue veils of the drags, of the wagonettes, and of the hansom cabs, the supplementary noses, the dolls, the "scratchers," and all that is called the "fun of the fair," and would be more fittingly denominated the "tomfoolery." Such a roadside position and its consequences naturally led to differences of opinion between the landlord and the tenant; for the former always represents them as an advantage, justifying a claim for higher rent, and the latter, whether *bonâ fide* or *malâ fide*, always, of course, enlarges upon the nuisance and demands a reduction. Mr. Triggs, immediately after the Spring Meeting, having been only seven or eight months in his house, though he had ever since his marriage lived in the neighbourhood, sent in a request for a diminution of rent and, with all the confident persistence of one who was conscious of being a very eligible tenant, forwarded to his landlord a second and still more urgent application immediately after the Summer Meeting, having, every evening during that meeting, invited some friends to come and dine with him and enjoy the scenes provided by the occurrences of "the road" on the return of the race-goers to London. In making his complaint and his demand for a reduction of rent he had particularly dwelt upon the anxiety undergone during the passage of disorderly, dishonest and ruffianly crowds, by the possessors of valuable property, and upon the considerable expense they were put to in having to procure additional assistance in looking after it. The expense was that of having friends to dinner; for, of course, while they enjoyed the spectacle, they added to the protective resources of the establishment.

He was smiling complacently at a recently-received and favourably couched reply from his landlord, after the preliminary interchange of statements, counter-statements, expostu

lations, insinuations, recriminations, and threats, on a certain evening about a week after the agreement arrived at between Captain and Mrs. Davies respecting the deed of separation. Mr. Triggs having, according to his wont, worked hard all day, was enjoying his *otium sine dignitate*. He was seated at an open window in his dining-room, with the decanters, left out when the dining-table was cleared, on the ledge of a book-case within easy reach. He wore a coat of brown holland, very short in the sleeves; his necktie was loosened and mingled curiously with his tawny beard, which was now streaked with gray, and which rippled down over his shirt-front; his waistcoat was open, for the sake both of ease and of coolness, for the weather was, in his own phraseology, "a smoker;" he sat in one chair with his slippered feet upon another; in his mouth was a meerschaum pipe, which he preferred to the very best of cigars; and, as he threw down, with a chuckle, the satisfactory letter he had been reading, he turned his face to the window and cast an eye of almost unconscious admiration but of perfectly conscious delight over lawn, and trees, and flower-beds, where a variety of bright colours made a lively spectacle, and whence a delicious perfume was wafted to his nostrils. A curious, sympathetic smile broke out on his countenance, parted his lips, and softened his stern features, as his glance wandered from the flower-beds to the garden-wall, and rested upon a little watering-pot, from which the drops had not yet ceased to trickle, and upon a little spade that stood beside it, propped against the wall. He looked askance at the letter he had thrown down, and, with an air of grim amusement, muttered:

"I don't believe I *should* ha' gone, after all: Lurley wouldn't ha' stood it."

At this moment entered Mrs. Triggs, with that serene, placid, happy look so generally worn by a mother who has just seen her child to bed. Mrs. Triggs was as handsome and stately as ever, but in other respects very different from the Marietta of former times. Her gait was still that of a Juno among the goddesses, but over her dark face and eyes had come quite a new expression, matronly, kind, gentle, with a

mixture even of archness and playfulness—such is the contagion which children spread and which mothers are liable to catch. Imperial she was, as ever, but no longer imperious. With a silvery laugh, slightly remonstrant but genial withal, she exclaimed, as she observed Mr. Triggs in disarray :

“Well, my dear, I hope you are comfortable.”

“Lurley a-bed ? ” was the irrelevant rejoinder.

“Yes, and asleep,” was the reply ; “the little puss was so tired with her watering and gardening that she was asleep almost before she had her head upon the pillow. However, she sent a message to da.”

“Ah ! ” said Mr. Triggs carelessly : “what was it ? ”

“I was to give you a kiss (like that) and say, ‘Dood-night, Dod bless oo, be a dood man, and be tind to esybody, else I s’an’t love oo.’ ”

Mr. Triggs looked rather like a boy who, having some reason to expect a “tip,” receives a tract in the place of it. But he made no remark. Mrs. Triggs sat down opposite to him in a chair at the other side of the window, so that she couldn’t see what his eyes were fixed upon. They were fixed upon the little watering-pot and spade against the wall. Presently he spoke, saying :

“Well, we shan’t have to turn out of here just yet ; Master Slider has come to his senses ; he’s going to take off ten pound.”

“I’m very glad to hear it, for Lurlietta’s sake,” rejoined Mrs. Triggs, using her little girl’s full name, a compound ingeniously devised by the god-parents from Lurline and Marietta ; “she is so fond of this place ; it would have broken her heart, very nearly, to leave her little garden. But was it worth while to make so much fuss about ten pounds a year ? ”

“It’s always worth while to make any amount of fuss, as you call it,” replied Mr. Triggs gruffly and with lowering looks, “about ten pound or five pound or even one pound ; *pro-vided*,” he went on didactically, “you don’t give up a chance o’ makin’ more and don’t waste valooable time—valooable, mind you, not time that you’re a-fritterin’ away out o’ business-hours, as I might be now—in makin’ the fuss. It’s good practice for yer. Besides, it’s always worth while to let people see that

you're a-goin' to 'ave your own way; they'll give in all the sooner another time, or else they'll come to the pint at once and save trouble. And what's more, let me tell you, there's a proverb about Coutts, a French 'un, but the French, of course, have heard all about Coutts, and the meanin' of it is that 'it's the first step that made Coutts;' if he hadn't made a fuss about ten pound, or five pound, or even one pound, what would he ha' bin? Depend upon it, Etta, the habit grows upon yer; if you don't make a fuss about ten pound, you'll get into the way of not makin' a fuss about fifty pound: and then you might as well go and 'ang yerself at once."

Mrs. Triggs sighed, but said nothing. She had learnt that Mr. Triggs, as of yore, or to a greater extent than of yore, was "no more to be bent than a whole regiment of the British Grenadiers." In the early part of their married life she had withstood him to the face, had answered argument with argument, sneer with sneer, and, if he would clinch his fist and bring it down heavily in a fit of fury upon the table, she would reply, whilst her black eyes flashed defiance into his glaring gray ones, with a passionate stamp upon the ground. But, under the mild, loving, softening rule of little Lurlietta, she had begun to study peace and quietness, and had found that they were most readily obtained by allowing Mr. Triggs to "blow off steam" uninterruptedly.

He pondered awhile in moody silence; but at last he broke it, saying:

"There's a devil of a mess over Notting Hill way."

"Oh Tom!" cried Mrs. Triggs, starting; "you don't say so! What in the world have those unhappy creatures been doing now? I thought things could not be much worse than they were before. Are they ruined? Or what is it?"

"Ruined's not the worst of it," answered Mr. Triggs gloomily.

She sprang from her chair, but immediately sank down again, murmuring:

"Not the worst of it! Pray, tell me all about it; hide nothing from me."

And she assumed as much as her changed nature would

allow her to assume of that proud, resolute, self-possessed, adamant exterior which had in former times so delighted Mr. Triggs, and caused him to glory in the reflection that she was a "reg'lar hard 'un" and "carried a stiff upper lip."

"It's a bad business," said Mr. Triggs, "but it's not a very long story, so you can hear it without interrupting me. I'll answer any questions you have to ask afterwards; leastways I will if I can. Me and the Captin and Mrs. Captin were down at Dan Tribe's the greater part o' this morning, settlin' matters. And the long and short o' the thing is that, what with his horse-racin' and what with her playin' ducks and drakes and the fine lady in forrin' parts as well as at home, with her carriages and jewels and gamblin' along with Roosian princes and princesses, they won't have above eight hundred a year between 'em, after their debts are paid, to bless themselves with, them that only a few years ago had their ten thousand. So much for that part o' the business. Now comes the other part, which is worse, or, at any rate, some people would consider it worse, though I'm not at all sure that it is; I can't conceive anything much worse than to lose ten thousand a year in about the same number of years or less. However, that's neither here nor there; the fact is, Captin and Mrs. Captin have cut one another's connection. There!"

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mrs. Triggs, turning pale; "what do you mean? Have they quarrelled?"

"Don't know as they've quarrelled exactly; they're so high and mighty, and they carry it off in such a grand style; they're as mincin' and perlite to one another as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths; but, for all that, I expect there's been a tremenjuous kick-up in private, and at any rate they've signed a deed of separation."

"How do you know?"

"Because they had me in to help 'em. They went to Dan Tribe, because they knew he was a friend o' mine and could be depended upon to be mum, and do all that was necessary, so fur as witnesses and third parties were necessary, without lettin' the cat out o' the bag any more than could be helped;

and they had me in to help 'em, because I know a good deal about their affairs a'ready, and because they could trust you and me not to blab. And, of course, they don't want to make a hullabaloo and get talked about and perhaps put into the papers. Mrs. Capting was for keeping it a secret even from *you*; but the Capting, who, for all his being uppish, can behave very handsome when he likes, insisted upon your being told; and he said you had a right to know, considerin' how near a relation you were, how awkward it might be for you, if you were kept in ignorance, and how onreasonable it would be to expect me to never let out to you about it. He's not a bad feller, the Capting, though he has borrowed a deal o' money from me. As for madam," continued Mr. Triggs with a bitter laugh, "she was just the same as ever, treated me, as usual, like the dirt under her feet, gave me two fingers to shake as if she was determined I shouldn't spile more of her elegant kids than she could help, looked at me as if I was a little insect that she had to screw her eyes up to see instead of bein' a pretty good size of a man, and didn't talk to me but at me. If I was the Capting," he concluded fiercely, "I'd 'ave 'er into the Divorce Court and 've done with it."

"Tom," said Mrs. Triggs, with her old haughty manner, "how *dare* you talk like that? Remember," she added more gently, "she is my sister, and, with the exception of ourselves, dear little Lurley's only blood-relation, so far as I know. Are you aware what your words implied? Have you any ground for your insinuation?"

"Well, no, I haven't, and that's the fact; but she has always hated me and never took any pains not to show it; and I spoke out o' spite, I confess," replied Mr. Triggs sullenly.

"What is the cause of the separation, then?"

"Hanged if I know; Dan Tribe used a long word meanin', I believe, that they led the life o' cat and dog and couldn't stand it any longer. In fact, they've agreed to differ and to part."

"To live apart, I suppose?"

"Of course."

"Then they'll not keep it secret very long," said Mrs. Triggs with a sigh; "and the world will put its own kind construction on the matter."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Triggs grimly; "they've managed to dodge the world beautiful; things have turned out well for them so fur."

"How so?"

"Why, look here, the Captin, as I said before, isn't half a bad feller; he's real grit, as the Yankees say, for all his lackadaisical ways. I shouldn't wonder if he'd ha' made a good man o' business, if he'd ha' bin brought up to it; but he wasn't. He's got lots o' pluck and decision, and he don't mind lookin' his difficulties in the face and puttin' his shoulder to the wheel to get out o' them. No sooner does he come to smash than he pulls himself together, applies for active service, and, he's off to the East Injies or the West Injies or anywhere else they please to send him, ready to go in for any hard work he can find to his hand. Luckily for him he's got sent to the East Injies, Bengal or Bombay or somewhere there; and he'll start in a week or two. So you see they live together, that is, in the same house, until he goes; and then Mrs. Captin, whose 'ealth won't allow her to go to India,' you know (or some gammon o' that kind), is left behind, and the separation takes place quite naturally, and they never live together again, unless time and distance should work a cure and make them think better of one another. She'll be a grass widder, as they call it, that's all, so fur as appearances go."

"I'm sure Lurline could never live in India," said Mrs. Triggs pensively, "especially at a military station, from all I have heard and read of such things. I daresay, after all, that was the whole reason for the separation."

"But why have a legal deed drawn up, then," asked Mr. Triggs, "binding him to this, that, and the other, and her to this, that, and the other; and both of them to never trouble one another any more? There would have been no occasion for as much as that; it would have been a simple case of an officer on forring service leaving his wife at home."

"I suppose, of course, that he has made as good a provision for her as he could under the circumstances."

"I said he wasn't half a bad fellow, wasn't the Capting; and the way he's acted as regards her provision is more than handsome, it's downright—what d'ye call it?—shrivellous, I think they call it, or something like that; I call it cursed folly. I told you they would have about eight hundred a year left. Well, out of that, he takes just a hundred and fifty for himself, and every other penny is to go to her to do just as she likes with, whether it turns out to be more or less than Dan Tribe expects. What d'ye say to that?"

"It is very generous and even chivalrous, as you say," replied Mrs. Triggs gravely; "but, first of all, you seem to have taken it for granted that Lurline was to blame, whereas it is quite possible that Captain Davies may have tried to atone for having himself been to blame by behaving so handsomely as regards the money; in the second place, he will have his pay; and, in the third place, I am afraid that, after what Lurline has been accustomed to, she will find herself very much cramped and inconvenienced. She is not at all the sort of person to economise; she really wouldn't know how to do it."

"Oh! yes, he'll have his pay," rejoined Mr. Triggs, passing over her concluding words; "he'll have his pay, and a fat lot it is for his horse-racin' and his other expenses; and he'll have all the hard work and the Injun sun and the liver complaint and the yaller jaunders and the dys'nterries and the murderous niggers and all the rest of it. He won't have much the best o' the bargain, it strikes me."

There was a pause of a few minutes, and then Mrs. Triggs, looking wistfully at her husband, said in a hesitating manner:

"You are their principal creditor, I believe, Tom, aren't you?"

"Oh! dear no," answered Mr. Triggs very dryly; "I shouldn't say so: I should say it was the noblemen and the gen'l'men and the Levi-aythans, or whatever they call 'em, that bet thousands o' pounds about one 'orse bein' better than another, and the carriage-builders and the 'orse-dealers (fancy five hundred guineas for a pair of 'orses!), and the

jewellers and the petticoat-makers (about a guinea an inch for a petticoat, I'm told), and all the rest of 'em. *They're* the creditors: and they have to be paid, pretty sharp too, especially the noblemen and the gen'l'men and the Levi-aythans. If you don't pay a nobleman or a gen'l'man to the day or very near it, there's the devil and all to pay; the others don't so much matter, bar the Levi-aythans, and they can make it precious onpleasant for you sometimes. I heard a good story about a Levi-aythan," continued Mr. Triggs with a guffaw at the remembrance, "the other day at Askit. There's a nobleman that's dropped a deal o' money on what they call the turf, and lately he hasn't been able to come up to time; and, I suppose, bein' a nobleman, he thought it didn't matter whether he paid a Levi-aythan, who is only a common feller, on the nail or left the debt to be settled by his zecutors. Well, the other day, in the ring, as they call the place where they do all the bettin' tomfoolery at the races, the Levi-aythan was sittin' perched up very conspickyus on the railin' o' the enclosure and shoutin' out 'I'll lay seven monkeys to four'—(a monkey's five hundred pound with those fellers)—'agin Candlestick'—(that's the name of a race-orse). Well, the nobleman smiled and nodded to him quite affable, meanin' that he'd take the bet, and the Levi-aythan calls out as loud as ever he could—and that's about as loud as a clap o' thunder: 'No, thankee, my lord; this is a ready-money day, my lord.' There was a reg'lar roar o' laughter, I'm told," concluded Mr. Triggs with an air of great relish, "all round the ring; and I don't wonder at it; it's one o' the best things I ever heard."

Mrs. Triggs had seemed to listen attentively, but the latter portion of what he said had probably gone in at one ear and out at the other, for she rejoined in an absent sort of way:

"Of course, I understand all that; but did not you advance them a great deal of the money when they were in a hurry?"

"Cert'nly," replied Mr. Triggs doggedly; "I advanced the Captin' a lot o' money, and I let him have it cheaper than he could ha' got it anywhere else. And so he said hisself: 'It's much better to come to you, Triggs,' he said, 'than to go to a

Jew; you're quicker and you're more generous.' Those were his very words."

Mrs. Triggs looked far from pleased.

"You don't mean to say that you made a profit out of them, Tom?" she remarked disapprovingly.

Mr. Triggs opened his eyes to the extent required to express the most unbounded astonishment.

"D'ye suppose I let him have the money for nothing?" he exclaimed. "Why, if I'd employed it in other ways, I could ha' made four times as much as I charged *him*. The Captin saw that hisself, and said he was much obliged to me; and so he ought to ha' been."

"So you *have* profited by their troubles?" observed Mrs. Triggs, in a tone of grievous disappointment.

"Well, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good," rejoined Mr. Triggs cheerfully. "I consider, as I told you, that I've lost by 'em, so far as money goes, but I've gained in other ways."

"How?"

"I've won—the double event, for one thing."

"What do you mean? You've used that expression once or twice before, Tom, and I can't think what you allude to. I know nothing about any double event, as you call it. What *is* it?"

"I may tell you one of these days; it's enough for you now to know that I've won it," answered Mr. Triggs gruffly.

An angry gleam came, in the old fashion, into his wife's eyes, and her lips opened as if to reply; but the gleam died away, and the words did not pass beyond the enclosure of the teeth. Something seemed suddenly to arrest the course of her thoughts. She fixed her gaze upon vacancy, and appeared to be listening attentively.

"What's matter?" growled her husband, who had noticed her demeanour.

"I thought I heard Lurley," she answered, with a gentle smile, "but it was a false alarm."

The reply seemed to have some effect upon the current of his ideas.

"I may as well tell you," he observed abruptly, "that, though we shan't leave here at once, as I thought we might have to do, we shall not remain here so long as you and Lurley imagine, perhaps."

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you. You know that I was always vexed at your not having that house at Notting Hill left to you, and that I always had a fancy for it. Well, now I've got it."

"You?"

"Yes, me."

"How did you get it?"

"I put down twenty thousand pound for it—house and grounds, and furniture, and fixtures, and everything but madam's jewellery and movables, just as it stood. And the Captin', he picked the money up, and dropped it all on the racecourse in a week or two, as if it had been a hot coal. He can't redeem the place, and so it comes to *me*."

"But Lurline, what did she do? You must have had her signature, as well as his, to *that* bargain. Whatever may have been her power over the rest of her property, I know that he couldn't dispose of the house without her consent. There was some stipulation in the will as to that."

"Oh, *she's* a reg'lar female Esau; she'd ha' signed away her birthright, if she'd had one, without turnin' a hair; and she did sign, just as if she'd been signin' a cheque for two or three pound."

"But you will never turn them out of house and home, Tom!"

"Cert'nly not, Etta; but do be reasonable. Business is business. That house and all belongin' to it, freehold and everything, was given to me as security for so much money; the money ain't paid, and ain't goin' to be, and so I keep the security. I can't help it; and I'm not to blame. As long as they can live in the house, they're quite welcome. But, after what I've told you about the Captin' bein' off to India, and the pair of 'em havin' agreed to differ and live separate, I don't think they're likely to want it long."

"Still Lurline might live there, whilst George is abroad."

"What, on the income she'll have out of the leavin's of their ten thousand a year? Not very likely: she couldn't keep such a house as that up at all, and cert'nly not in the style she's been accustomed to."

Mrs. Triggs was too sensible and too well acquainted with her husband's nature, principles, habits, and frame of mind to propose any sort of romantic generosity. She sighed deeply, as she murmured:

"I *am* so sorry, Tom. Poor, dear Lurline! . What will she do? I must go and see her to-morrow."

Mr. Triggs made no remark.

"I don't think I *could* live in that house, Tom," Mrs. Triggs said, after a while: "I should be haunted by reproachful faces; I should be always fancying that poor papa and poor Lurline were whispering to me that I had no business there."

"Stuff!" remarked Mr. Triggs laconically; "besides," he continued, "nobody asked you to; we couldn't afford it yet."

"When I see Lurline to-morrow," said Mrs. Triggs, "I shall ask her to come and stay with us as long as she likes, when her husband has gone, or at once, if she prefers it."

"Do!" assented Mr. Triggs, with the grace of a sardonic bear; "I would if I was you."

"Do you object?"

"Not I; but *she* will, you'll see; she'd as soon think of comin' to live out Clapham way and with our lot, as she'd think of goin' to Greenland and takin' up with a pack o' slimy seals. She hasn't troubled *us* with much of her company. Besides, she hates me: always did."

"She's very fond of Lurley, I'm sure."

"Oh! are you? Lurley's very fond of *her*, I know, though I don't know why; but that's a very different thing."

"Well, I shall ask her, at any rate," said Mrs. Triggs with a little of her old haughty, imperious manner, as she rose to leave the room.

"By all means," assented Mr. Triggs with a grin.

And the subject was dropped for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A SISTERLY INTERVIEW.

NEXT day Mrs. Triggs was as good as her word. She ordered her brougham soon after breakfast and, taking little Lurlietta with her, drove off to pay a visit to Mrs. Davies at Notting Hill. Mrs. Davies received her sister with easy grace and her sister's child with that mixture of playfulness and effusion which is generally found to be most effective and taking with children.

"Oh! auntie, I so dad to see 'ou!" exclaimed the little girl, nestling close to her aunt, who had made room for her on a small couch; "'ou never tome to see us; why don't 'ou tome to see us?"

"I'm so busy, dear," answered Mrs. Davies languidly.

"Oh! ha, ha!" laughed Lurlietta; "'ou so busy! Ma, auntie says she's so busy! Ha, ha! She always lyin' on sofa, lookin' out o' de winder! Isn't she, ma? Ha, ha!"

"Don't you be saucy, or I shall pinch you," rejoined Mrs. Davies, suiting the action to the word.

"Oh! don't, auntie, 'ou hurt!" squealed Lurlietta; "I didn't sink 'ou *could* hurt," she continued, looking wistfully in her aunt's face, "'ou are so soft and smooove and nice, like butterfries and angels."

"Oh! I can hurt tre-mendously, when I like," said her aunt, with a peculiar look; "can't I, Etta?" she continued, appealing to Mrs. Triggs.

"I daresay you can, dear," answered Mrs. Triggs with a sigh; "we can all do that, I'm afraid. But I want to speak

to you seriously. Lurlietta, run into the garden, dear; you'll find lots of old friends there. May she go, Lurline?"

"Oh! 'es, auntie," cried Lurlietta, jumping up from the couch, which was close by the open windows leading down through the conservatory into the garden; "let me do; I'll do and see dard'ner; I want to tell him about *my* darden, and det him to dive me some seeds. Do let me do!"

"Go along then, puss," assented Mrs. Davies carelessly; and Lurlietta toddled down the steps with all the alacrity of which a six-years-old little maiden is capable.

And the sisters were alone.

Mrs. Triggs moved her chair close to her sister's couch, and, taking Mrs. Davies affectionately by the hand, asked:

"Where is George?"

"Not at home, I believe; but I know nothing of his movements."

"What is all this dreadful business Tom has been telling me about?"

"Which?" answered Mrs. Davies, yawning; "that George has ruined me? Or that we have agreed to part?"

"Pray don't talk so indifferently, Lurline; I have come to see whether I can be of any use to you."

"You! Ha, ha! You're very kind, Etta; but I don't think you can do anything. You can't recover my money; and you can't mend the other matter. Oh dear! I wish I had married a money-getting instead of a money-spending animal. You had the best of it after all, Etta, with that burly brute of yours."

"Lurline," said Mrs. Triggs, dropping her sister's hand and speaking sternly but not angrily; "there is no occasion to allude to my husband at all; if you do, you must do so respectfully."

"You know I always hated the wretch," remarked Mrs. Davies contemptuously.

"Lurline!" exclaimed Mrs. Triggs in a warning tone. "I came," she continued, "to talk over *your* affairs, if you chose to confide in me. If not, I had better go; I shall not stay with you to hear my husband abused."

"Well, what do you want to know?" asked Mrs. Davies peevishly; "you know, I suppose, that that Jew of a husband of yours has jockeyed us out of this house——"

Mrs. Triggs rose hastily, but sat down again as her sister resumed, in a different strain :

"Well, well, Etta, I'll say no more on that subject. It was not your fault, I know; and that J——, that wr——, that br——, I mean, your husband, let us have money on better terms than we could have obtained it elsewhere. And I'm sure you're quite welcome to the house; I'm sick of it, and I couldn't keep it up *now*."

"George is going to India, isn't he?"

"Yes, in a fortnight; to join his regiment."

"Couldn't—you—go—with him?"

"My dear Etta! Why, we have agreed to part! Besides, I never could live the life of a working soldier's wife, and in India too. In fact, that was at the bottom of our agreeing to part."

"I felt sure it was," said Mrs. Triggs with an air of relief and a flush of satisfaction.

"What else could you suppose it was?" asked Mrs. Davies coolly.

"Still it seems a small reason for a separation," urged Mrs. Triggs; "did you quarrel over it?"

"I'll tell you exactly how it happened," replied Mrs. Davies; "I tried a little stratagem to turn George from his purpose. Nothing I could say had any effect upon him; and I vowed that if he insisted upon going to India, I would astonish him. So, one night, I pretended to run away from him; I left a few words to say that I had gone off with somebody else, and that he could go to India as soon as he liked after *that*. The fact is, that though I didn't tell him where I had gone to, I had gone to stay with Lady Stapleton at her brother's—Major Shorthose's—house at Wimbledon. George discovered accidentally, before I had time to tell him, that I was at Major Shorthose's; he didn't know that Major Shorthose was not there but that Lady Stapleton was; and, moreover, when I wrote to explain the whole joke to him, I, by mistake, sent

him the wrong letter; indeed I sent him the very letter which I had written to Major Shorthose (to invite myself to his house at Wimbledon), which, to keep up the comedy, I had worded rather ambiguously, and which I requested Major Shorthose to return to me for fear he should suppose that it was anything more than a farce, and on purpose that, if necessary, I might show it to George when the proper time came. Well, George, having received that letter accidentally, and having observed that I was naturally rather confused at the scrape I had got into by sending him in mistake the letter I had written to Major Shorthose, chose to fly into a furious passion, refused to believe my account of the matter, although there were Major Shorthose and Lady Stapleton and the facts themselves to prove that I had merely paid a little visit to Lady Stapleton; and, in short, he stormed and fumed and said such dreadful things that we thought it better to separate. He said that he could never feel confidence in me again; and, though I didn't say so, I'm sure I could never love the man who has lost all my money."

"But, Lurline," said Mrs. Triggs gravely, "wasn't it very imprudent? I wonder there was not bloodshed; those gentlemen in the army are so very fiery and combative; it is a mercy Captain Davies did not kill Major Shorthose."

"Oh! there was no fear," sneered Mrs. Davies scornfully; "gentlemen—even officers—don't fight nowadays; and perhaps that," she added with a curious, yearning look, "is the reason why they don't love as they did. I really believe that Major Shorthose and George are better friends than ever. I've no doubt the great cowardly cur of a Major talked the matter over quite coolly with George, and that they both had a good laugh at my expense, and agreed that I was to be sacrificed."

"But, Lurley, I can't understand it all. If it was a mere jest—though a very dangerous one—and you could prove that it was, there could not have been much difficulty in making matters straight, if you and George still love one another."

"If, and if, and if!" sneered Mrs. Davies petulantly.

"But you *do* love one another, Lurley?"

Mrs. Davies mused for a few moments, and then she replied through her set teeth :

"Etta, I really believe that I have got to—hate—the—man."

"Hate? Whom? Not George!" exclaimed Mrs. Triggs in dismay.

"Yes—George," snarled Mrs. Davies defiantly.

"My dear Lurley! Pray don't talk so wildly; why you used to worship the very ground he trod upon."

"Did—I—really! Well, then, I was a fool: I have long ceased to do that. Nobody, you know, is a hero to his valet; and I fancy that few husbands are heroes to their wives—at any rate, for long. He introduced me into society to which I had not been accustomed; and I soon found that, in the places and among the people we got acquainted with, he was a very small star indeed, though I had considered him a very great luminary. On the other hand, I, who had been nobody, was courted by the highest in the land, especially abroad. A prince would hold my fan, Etta, and a duke my gloves, and an ambassador would look as pleased at one of my smiles, as if he had received some new order. I have danced with a king, and millionaires have left the prettiest women to come and join my circle. I found that it was no great honour to be the wife of Captain Davies, but that it was considered a great distinction to be the husband of Mrs. Davies. It was myself, Etta, that the men admired and the women envied; and the grandest of all the men would have laid his title at my feet. And now it is all over; George has ruined me, and I must hide my face away somewhere. I have no more means to carry on the campaign."

"Oh, Lurley, Lurley—don't speak so! Surely you and George have many years of happiness to come. You are both so young and were once so loving. And was he altogether to blame, dear, for the losses you have had? I have heard, from a little bird, that you, too, were not guiltless of gambling."

"He taught me," rejoined Mrs. Davies passionately; "he taught me. He took me to all sorts of places, and I saw other ladies playing, and I played. And I lost. But what is the

use of a man if he can't recover losses? That was another thing that lowered George in my eyes. He talked very learnedly and knowingly about chances, and odds, and horses, and horse-racing, and this, that, and the other: but he never won—not even on the turf; or, if he did win now and then, it was only a mere trifle. Somebody must win: why couldn't *he*? And when I saw him going on constantly losing, losing, losing, I declare I began to despise him. I couldn't help thinking that papa wouldn't have lost; and that great bru—that huge husband of yours wouldn't have lost."

"Oh, Lurley, Lurley, what a sad, wasted life! I do so wish you had a—a—something at *home*, dear, to look after, and watch over, and love, and teach, and—what is more—learn from."

Mrs. Davies looked out of the window, and then said with a sigh:

"Ah, you mean a little darling like that of yours. There's another thing. It might have been very different between George and me, if I *had*—but it's all over now."

And she withdrew her eyes from the window, and fixed them piteously upon her sister. After a long pause:

"What do you mean to do, Lurley, when George has gone?" asked Mrs. Triggs.

"I shall go abroad. I won't be poor; I can't be poor; I couldn't live poor."

"Would you—would you—come to *us*, Lurley?"

Mrs. Davies stared at her sister with an air of incredulity.

"To *you*?—to *live* with you, do you mean?"

"Yes; we would do all we could to make you happy; of course, we could not promise to give you the same society that you have had since your marriage; in other respects——"

"You would live *here*, of course," interrupted Mrs. Davies coldly; "you know it all belongs to you now."

"It would be a great inducement," replied Mrs. Triggs affectionately; "it would be as if *we* came to live with *you*; and that would overcome the feeling I now have, Lurley, that I could never live in this house again, or, at any rate, never be happy in it."

Mrs. Davies regarded her sister furtively, and rejoined coldly:

"It couldn't be, Etta; I could never rest, either where you are now at Clapham, or here either, under the roof of that bru—, that wre—, that scou—, that *man*, I mean—your husband. (Pray excuse me, dear; I can't help it.) I should mur—I mean I should give him a dose of something—I'm sure I should. I never did like him, and now I like him less than ever, because he has helped to make me poor. I could never help feeling that he had turned me out of my own house, for all that I should remain in it, and that he had a hand in making me so poor. For, though he let us have money when we wanted it, and at a comparatively cheap rate, he had an object in it, as surely as I am sitting here. He keeps his counsel beautifully—I'll acknowledge that; but that he had some deep purpose I'll swear. No, no, Etta; you're very kind, but it's impossible."

"Impossible!—there's nothing impossible, Lurley. Where there's a will, there's a way."

"There's no will, then," rejoined Mrs. Davies sullenly. "It's preposterous; how could I possibly receive my friends, when I was no longer mistress of what was my own house? Do not you see how ridiculous it would be?"

"I quite see your difficulty," answered Mrs. Triggs with a sigh. "You must do as you think best; but, as you are so determined not to be poor," she added with a sad smile, "it was the only way that occurred to me of helping you, and, at the same time, amply repaying myself."

"Oh, you needn't trouble yourself about *me*!" said Mrs. Davies loftily; "I shall go abroad; and," she concluded with a significant glance, "I know how I can increase my small income there."

"Oh, Lurley, take care!" said Mrs. Triggs, with a wistful look at her sister; "you don't intend to speculate at those horrid——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" broke in Mrs. Davies; "you needn't be afraid, my dear; a burnt child shuns the fire. I've had quite enough of the board of green cloth. No, no; I mean something very different."

"Will you tell me what it is?"

"No—n—no, I think not; at any rate, not yet. You must not set a value on your bear's skin before you've caught your bear; and, though I feel pretty certain that I shall catch mine, I haven't caught him yet. Why," she exclaimed suddenly, "there's Lurlietta!"

And, sure enough, there was the little body, sitting quite still upon a stool, with her eyes very wide open, an expression of mingled astonishment and consternation on her face, her ears pricked up, and her looks wandering from aunt to mother, and from mother to aunt.

"How long have you been there, pet?" inquired Mrs. Davies.

"Not *very* long, auntie," she replied gravely; "I tamed in dust as 'ou said 'ou 'ouldn't be poor; and ma and 'ou were so busy tautin' at one anoser, 'ou didn't tate any notice of me. And so I sat kite till, and didn't int'upt."

"What a queer little dot it is!" said Mrs. Davies to Mrs. Triggs. "She's not a bit like you, Etta; she's more like her father, with those blue eyes, and that curly, light-brown hair. But there the likeness ceases; she's so tiny, and delicate, and graceful, she looks like a little fairy. But though *she's* not like *you*, Etta, *you* are like *her* at times. What I mean is that you seem, sometimes, to have caught her smile and way of looking at one, from constantly being with her, I suppose. Why, whatever is the matter now?"

The question arose from the behaviour of Lurlietta, who had thrown herself upon her aunt's neck, and was sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Don't do away, auntie!" she cried; "oh don't, don't, don't! I don't want 'ou to do away; 'ou so nice and pitty and soft and tind. Da dot penty money; I tell him to dive 'ou as much as ever 'ou want."

"Hush, darling, hush!" said Mrs. Davies, soothing her; "you don't know what you are saying. Really, Etta, this is too distressing. I think you had better take her home."

The little creature kissed her aunt passionately, and then went quietly to her mother's side.

Mrs. Triggs rose to go.

"Pray think over what I have said, Lurley," she pleaded; "and let me know if you have any suggestion to make."

"*Mille remerciements, ma chère,*" replied Mrs. Davies gaily, as she accompanied her sister and niece to their carriage; "if I think of anything, I will certainly let you know. I am already beginning to get ready for a start; but I shall see you, of course, before I set off. My compliments to Bluebeard."

"Oo Buebeard?" asked Lurlietta wonderingly.

"Only a friend of your mamma's and mine, pet," replied Mrs. Davies, laughing, and kissing her hand to sister and niece as the brougham drove off "out Clapham way."

The rest of the day Lurlietta spent in a brown study. She could scarcely rouse herself so far as to consult the gardener as to the seeds she had brought from Notting Hill. She appeared to be pondering some profound scheme.

"I think, missy," said James, the gardener, "we'll put these seeds in round this here bed; they'll make a lovely border o' bright blue, as 'll look well against them two 'red-hot pokers' in the middle there."

"Dus 'ou pease, Dames," answered Lurlietta, indifferently.

Whereat James, the gardener, marvelled greatly, and eyed her anxiously, confiding to his wife afterwards his fears that "little missy" was "sickenin' for summut—measles, or scarlet fever, or summut o' that;" for, "in generally," he truly observed, she was "a reg'lar little beggar to argey and knag and talk anybody silly."

But she was revolving a grand scheme.

It was her practice to garden just under the window of the dining-room, whilst her father and mother were at dinner, and to carry on a conversation with them through the open window, as she plied her spade here and there, and, watering-pot in hand, watered her flowers and her frock and her shoes and her socks with impartial liberality. She would then join her parents at dessert for a few minutes, and, having passed her opinion upon the affairs of the world, trot off to bed when her mother left the table. On this particular evening she had

gone through her gardening so methodically and silently that Mr. Triggs had asked his wife :

"What's up with Lurley?"

"Nothing that I know of."

"She's not been naughty?"

"Oh dear no; as good as gold."

"That's all right," observed Mr. Triggs with great satisfaction, as if nothing could possibly be better than gold; "but she's mighty quiet to-night. Where's she bin to-day?"

"I took her with me to see her aunt."

"Ah! I recollect," rejoined Mr. Triggs with a grim smile; "and what did she say to your offer?"

"You were quite right; she declined it altogether."

"Of course she did; I knew she would; it was a guinea to a shillin' she would. She'd as lief live in the same house with me, as a cobry capelly 'd live in the same cage with a polar bear. Ha, ha! well, you've done what you could. What does she mean to do?"

"She talks of going abroad."

"I rather expected she'd go into forring parts; her income 'll sound tremenjuous in francs or tailers, and it'll go further, too, than it would here. One comfort is, she'll turn out o' the house without any fuss or trouble; and, when the time comes, we can turn in."

"I couldn't do it, Tom," replied Mrs. Triggs with emotion; "at any rate for some time to come."

"Nobody asked yer," rejoined Mr. Triggs moodily; "I couldn't do it *myself* just yet; though not for your sentimental reasons, perhaps. Why, bless my soul," he continued vehemently, "if they can't live in the house theirselves, who *should* live in it but their nearest relatives? However, there's a whole bushel o' reasons why we shouldn't go there yet a while. We don't want to have *their* grand friends coming calling at *our* house, as we should have, if we went in at once; and then all sorts of explanations would have to be given, and we don't want *that*. No, no; as soon as Madam has said adoo to the place, it must be let for a year or two. Oh! here's the little 'un."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

PANDORA.

THE years slipped by—one, two, three, and four. Business prospered with Mr. Triggs; the world went smoothly with Mrs. Triggs. Yet each had the usual cloud that dims the brightness of the sunniest existence. It was not that they had no more children; they were both content with Lurlietta alone, though perhaps the mother was inclined in her heart to regret that time had done its duty by the child, who had grown more subdued, more commonplace, less like a fairy, and whose tongue had lost its pretty lisp, with its confusion of letters, whilst the father openly expressed his evident pleasure that "the gal was beginning to look as if she was made of flesh and blood, and not of barley-sugar, and had left off talking gibberish." It was not that they heard little or nothing of Captain Davies, who had written one or two short letters from India to Mrs. Triggs, and had then ceased to write at all; for there had been but "little love lost," as Mr. Triggs put it, between "the lot," and as "no news was good news," they might take it for granted "the Capting was doing pretty well," or else, "if he'd been in want o' money, he'd ha' let it be known pretty quick." It was, on the part of Mr. Triggs, that his wife resisted all his efforts, which he had been making for the last eighteen months or more, to prevail upon her to move to Notting Hill; and it was, on the part of Mrs. Triggs, that she heard no tidings of her sister. Mrs. Davies had sent a few words on different occasions, at various intervals after her departure from

England, from many a foreign watering-place and many a snug, anti-winterly retreat in Germany and along those lovely shores whereby one reaches Nice from Genoa, and Marseilles from Nice; but, for the last two years or so, not a syllable had been received, and letters sent, contrary to her express direction, but in the hope of finding her, to her former addresses, which were generally "Poste restante" here, there, and everywhere, had been returned from the foreign post-offices. In each of those letters Mrs. Triggs had never omitted to press her sister to come back, whenever it pleased her, and the sooner the better, and share the house at Notting Hill, declaring that such participation alone could make a residence there tolerable; and in each of these letters there had been a little message or a little scrawl enclosed, with Lurlietta's love and endorsement of her mother's wishes. For the little girl had never forgotten her "pretty aunt," and it was owing to her constant inquiry, "Any news of auntie, mamma?" that Mrs. Triggs had her memory continually refreshed and her resolution fortified.

Mr. Triggs, however, had taken strong measures, as he was good enough to tell her. He had given notice to the tenants of the house at Notting Hill; and, whether Madam—as he chose to term Mrs. Davies—condescended or not to let her whereabouts be known, and reply to her sister's repeated invitations, to which he gave his assent, with a grim smile of perfect assurance as to their futility, he let it be known that he and his wife and child would move into the house at Notting Hill as soon as the present inmates had, to use his own elegant expression, "paid up and cleared out."

And the time for that "double event" was fast approaching.

A few months before it came Mrs. Triggs received a letter which caused her no little grief and consternation, modified, however, by a flutter of joy and a gleam of hope. Be it premised that, whenever anything calculated to cause you humiliation, pain, or sorrow, appears in a newspaper, somebody is pretty sure to send you the article or paragraph with the remark that "if you haven't already seen it, you might like to see it."

Mrs. Triggs, then, received the following letter :

“ The Parsonage, Uppersheet, Beds.

“ MY DEAR MRS. TRIGGS,

“ It is so very, very long since we met, that I fear you will have forgotten me altogether; and you never even knew me under the name I now bear. But I can assure you that I often think of you and of old times; and, as often as I think of you and them, a feeling comes over me which I cannot describe. I remember *so* well *all* the attentions shown me by your good father, and by you, and by your sweet sister, Lurline. And now that I have mentioned her name, I may be said to have broken the ice; for it is on her account that I have broken the long silence of these many years, a silence which commenced within a year from her marriage.

“ Ah! what a charming wedding that was! Such a lovely bride and such a handsome bridegroom I never saw before or since; both of them so young, both so favoured by nature and fortune, both so loving and so beloved; it seemed as if a long life of happiness must surely be in store for them. I recollect that but one thing occurred to mar the day's proceedings. Do you, too, recollect it? It was just as the bride and bridegroom drove off, and whilst you and I were waiting side by side for our carriage to come up; a shabby, crazy creature of a man called out in a loud voice, ‘ There go Baal and Ashtaroth!’

“ We both laughed, I remember, and thought the man was some poor madman, who didn't know what he was talking about. But, since I have been married to the Christian minister whose name I now bear, I have had my attention drawn to those religious matters which I am afraid both I and, if I may say so, you too neglected in the days of our familiar acquaintance. Well, those strange words uttered by that strange creature have recurred to me over and over again in these latter days when I hope I have learnt to value at their true worth the things of this world; and I have fancied that there was more than we imagined in the cry of that singular-looking man whom we took at the time for a mere idiot or madman. It is curious from what unexpected quarters the

warning voice is sometimes raised to admonish people of the dangers they run ; and I cannot help thinking that the supposed lunatic was moved, unconsciously, by a prophetic spirit to predict the evil to come. Baal and Ashtaroth ! The god that we associate with Mammon, and the goddess that we associate with Shame ! Pride and riches and sensuality ! Could any good come of a union between the World and the Flesh, of a marriage in which there was no thought of anything but of wealth and carnal beauty and frivolous enjoyment, without any regard for more sanctifying influences ?

“That, my dear Mrs. Triggs, it has since occurred to me, was the meaning of that mysterious utterance which so amused us at the time : the utterer himself may have been actuated, to his knowledge, by nothing but a feeling of general discontent, expressed in the language of a religious fanatic, and yet have been all the while the involuntary mouth-piece of a Power which never smites without a warning. In this idea of mine I have been greatly confirmed by reading the enclosed article, which was a complete revelation to me.

“You may, for all I know, be perfectly well acquainted with everything contained in it ; but it came upon *me* like a clap of thunder, and I thought that, if you hadn't seen it, you might like to see it.

“My dear husband, who is not only an excellent Christian minister but very clever, is a frequent visitor at a literary club in London, where he hears all the latest literary and artistic news from the most unexceptionable sources, so far as the truth of what he hears is concerned, though I am sorry to say that he is very often grieved at the means by which the information is obtained, and is obliged, as a Christian clergyman, to shut his ears sometimes to the details of what is reported to him. However, he is at any rate a good authority ; and he assures me that there can be no doubt whatever about the person meant in the article I send you. If you yourself have any doubt upon the subject, I shall be delighted to do all in my power to set your mind at rest. I also enclose a copy of some verses written by a member of the literary club which my dear husband frequently visits, and undisguisedly

addressed to the person whom I need not specify by name to you. The verses are, of course, *complimentary*.

"With my hearty condolence on the distress you must be suffering, if you already know the state of the case, and which, if not, you will suffer when you do know it,

"I remain, yours very sincerely,

"CHARLOTTE BURROWS (*née* FARQUHARSON).

"P.S.—You will be glad to hear that my sister Caroline has been happily married for some years. He is not rich, but he is at any rate a *gentleman*, I am glad to say. By-the-way, though I do not approve of her going to such places, Carrie went a few nights ago to see Madame Latouche (?) perform; and *she* declares that there can be *no doubt whatever*. 'I went on purpose,' are her own words, 'and I'll swear to her.' I don't like such strong language anywhere but before the judges of the land and the magistrates, before whom the Articles of Religion allow Christian men (and, I conclude, women) to swear and sin not, but it shows how certain she must feel, doesn't it? She went, before the article appeared, in consequence of a hint she received from my dear husband about the rumour afloat in literary and artistic circles.

"C. B."

The article sent by Mrs. Burrows to Mrs. Triggs ran thus:

"The unapproachable Madame Latouche has won the favour of everybody to whom the comic opera, made melodious by the sparkling music of Offenbach, is a delight; that is to say, to everybody who is anybody, except a few superior beings who set up for being intellectual and classical, and are merely dull and pedantic. Most reasonable beings go to the play to be amused; and amused, as well as charmed, they cannot help being by Madame Latouche. She has been but a fortnight in London; and already all London, to say nothing of visitors from the provinces, is at her feet. We have called her unapproachable; and so, if report speak truly, she is—in more than one sense. Artistically, she is without a rival; and personally, it is said, she is quite repellent. Let us not be misunderstood.

Her motto is believed to be: '*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*' We know what persecutions, to use a stronger word than attentions, such bewitching ladies, in such public situations, are exposed to; and she, if she be not falsely represented, is the victim of them to an incredible extent. Men of all ages and all ranks pay court to her, in season and out of season, and every one of them tries to recommend himself, as Joseph's brethren tried to recommend themselves, with costly present in hand. She is understood to be a widow, but, if so, she is a widow of the Widdy Malone stamp, of whom it was sung that 'No one iver could see her alone; let them ogle and sigh, they could ne'er catch her eye.' She is not so rude, they say, as to refuse the presents; but the donors might as well lay their offerings upon the shrine of a passionless goddess, save that there is a smile and a gracious word for every worshipper. No adorer, who presents his gift, is repulsed; no admirer, who presses his suit, is encouraged. And this coldness seems rather to stimulate than to check the flow of splendid oblations, from the furtive jewel lurking amidst the flowers of the complimentary bouquet to the more massive bracelet or tiara boldly left in person at her own door by the more adventurous aspirants. Hence, according to the foreign newspapers, her nickname of 'Pandora.'

"She is 'not at home,' they say, to visitors, unless they call by twos or threes. Riding or driving or walking, she is the cynosure of all eyes and the centre of a brilliant circle, but none of that circle is preferred before another. It may be thought that we are intruding upon matters which do not concern us. But what is the fact? The peculiarities of this gifted being have already been freely commented upon in foreign papers; and scandal has been busy with her name. It has been asked how it comes to pass that this widowed Angelina, before whom so many suitors bend, can find no Edwin of her choice. And she has been accused of heartlessness, flirtishness, and downright perfidy. It has been insinuated that the wealth of which she appears to be possessed, that the establishment she keeps up, that the entertainments she gives, attended, as they are, by men of all ranks and ladies

of note in the professional world, cannot be accounted for legitimately; and her name has been associated with that of an illustrious personage, who is a great power in Europe.

"Now, we are in a position to give a simple explanation, and to silence scandal for ever; and that is our justification for speaking out. Madame Thérèse Latouche, according to the general belief, is a Frenchwoman and a widow; and certainly her accent and her manner, whether as the Grande Duchesse or as La Périchole, or in any other of her favourite characters, would proclaim her more French than the most French among the members of her undoubtedly French company. Her grace and her vivacity are wholly French; but when had a Frenchwoman such a face and such a voice? The fact is that Madame Latouche is neither French nor a widow; she is English, and a wife. Her story is somewhat romantic. She is a Mrs. D——s, wife of an English cavalry officer, now serving with his regiment in India. She was the younger of two daughters, who were the only children of the late Mr. P——t, a very rich merchant in London. She inherited a large fortune, and it is only a few years since she and her husband, Captain D——s, created a considerable sensation in the fashionable world by the magnificent scale on which they lived. Losses, principally on the turf, where the presence of 'pretty Mrs. D——s,' as she was always called, was familiar to all race-goers, obliged the Captain to leave England for service in India; and Mrs. D——s, unable, it is believed, to bear an Indian climate, went abroad, where she cultivated her natural talents until they reached their present degree of perfection, which has enabled her, much to her credit, to increase, by the aid of her professional exertions, the comparatively scanty means remaining to her from the wreck of her private fortune. This simple account, which may be relied upon, and can be vouched for by many persons who knew Mrs. D——s before she left England, fully explains the chief mysteries connected with the career of 'Madame Latouche,' her superior bearing, her Penelopean avoidance of eligible suitors, her acquaintance with members of the higher classes, and renders quite unnecessary the solution suggested by scandal in the

form of relations existing between 'Madame' and a certain illustrious personage."

Such was the article in *The Speculum*, a London paper, which Mrs. Triggs never had seen in her life, and which, at the risk of actions for libel, attained considerable popularity, not for its literary excellence, but for its rag-and-bone-picking habit of ferreting out little bits of personal gossip, and hashing them up into unsavoury meat such as the inquisitive soul loveth.

The verses which accompanied the article, and which were signed "D. T.," ran thus :

TO THERESA.

(From HORACE.)

THERESA, didst thou ever fail
Of scathelessness for perjured tale,
By blemish of one finger-nail
Or pearly tooth,

I might believe ; but no—forswear
Thyself, and straightway, fairer fair
Thou tripp'st abroad, the public care
Of all the youth.

It pays to mock thy mother dead,
The night's dumb sentries overhead,
All Heaven, and gods enfranchisèd
From chilly death !

I tell ye Venus doth but smile ;
Smile artless Nymphs, and Cupid, while
His quenchless darts with gory file
He sharpeneth !

Why, all the pretty lads that grow,
Grow up for thee, new slaves I trow :
Nor quit the old, who threaten so,
Thy perjured house.

Thee mothers for their darlings dread,
Thee misers, and the newly wed,
Poor maidens, lest thy spell be shed
O'er married spouse.

Mrs. Triggs threw down both article and verses as soon as she had read them, and sat for some minutes overcome with emotion. She lived so completely out of the world of gaiety that no whisper had ever reached her of that Madame Latouche

who was taking the play-going public by storm. She did not even know the name of the theatre at which "*la belle Thérèse*" was winning her triumphs. She took up a newspaper, ran her eye over the advertisements, and soon found the information she sought. She was by no means inclined to take for granted the conclusions to which others had come. She determined to go to the theatre and form her own opinion for herself. But should she confide any part of her hopes, her fears and her intentions, to her husband or to Lurlietta or to both? To Lurlietta, on reflection, she made up her mind to say nothing; for, if the child had the least hint that her aunt Lurley was supposed to be not only in England but in London, there would be no peace until the aunt and the niece had been brought into personal communication. And to that there might be obstacles. But should she make a clean breast of everything to her husband? She must some day, if the suspicions which had been aroused in her were confirmed, for she had resolved upon a certain course of proceeding to win Lurline, if indeed it were Lurline, from the life of Madame Latouche, and the consent of Mr. Triggs would be necessary. Besides, she had never concealed anything from her husband; and this was hardly the occasion on which to commence concealment. She was in such a fever of anxiety to know the truth, that she would go to the theatre that very evening; and, as she must start before Mr. Triggs would have come home to dinner, she decided to set off at once for Thames Street and open her budget of news to her husband. He was surprised to see her, but he was less surprised than she expected at her communication. Indeed, he was not surprised at all; at which she most decidedly was. He read the letter from Mrs. Burrows, and the article, and the verses, and all he did was to indulge in a short guffaw. Mrs. Triggs was nettled.

"You treat it all very strangely," she said; "one would think that you knew all about it before, and considered it rather funny."

"I laughed at that old cat's spiteful letter, and at them verses," rejoined Mr. Triggs; "I think I know who wrote *them*, what with the initials, and what with the old cat sayin' that they were written by a literary friend of the Reverend Burrers."

"And who is *he*, pray?—the writer, I mean."

"His name is Dan Tribe; you may have heard of it before."

"Mr. Tribe! I should never have thought that *he* was that sort of man."

"Oh! he's a feller with a good many queer fancies is Dan; writes in the papers sometimes: you can see that these *versos* have been cut out of some paper or other. I've heard say he's brought out a play; rum thing for a lawyer, but he ain't the only one."

"Then he very likely knows something about this Madame Latouche."

"He certainly does."

"And what does he say? If it really is Lurline, she is pretty sure to have had some communication with him about her affairs."

"Of course she has."

"She *has*? Do you mean that she *really* has, and that you know she has?"

"I know she has."

"And it is Lurline?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Tribe told you so?"

"Well, no, he didn't. You see lawyers don't blab about their clients, especially if they're told not to. And Dan is not one o' the blabbing sort either."

"Then how did you learn what you have learnt, or suppose you have learnt?"

"Dan took me to the play one night, that night when I stayed out late, you know, and told you that I had an engagement with him. He told me not to be astonished at anything I saw; but by George, I was."

"And you—you—think—it was Lurline?"

"I'll take my oath of it."

"And you have known all this for ever so long," exclaimed Mrs. Triggs excitedly and angrily, "and never told me a word or gave me a hint about it! I think you have behaved shamefully."

"Now don't let's have any tantrums, at any rate before the time comes," replied Mr. Triggs coolly; "and do listen to me for a moment, if you can, without looking as if you

considered me rather worse than three or four scoundrels rolled into one. I tell yer I went with Dan to the play; and I spotted her at once. So I pulled Master Dan over the coals for not telling me, as he must ha' known. Then he explained to me that Madam had told him particularly not to tell anybody; but that, if people found out for themselves, why it couldn't be helped. So, as he said, he gave me an opportunity of finding out for myself, which was as much as he was justified in doing, though he was nearly busting to let the whole cat out o' the bag. Then I consulted him about telling you; and we agreed that it would be best to say nothing at all about it. You were not likely to come across her, and she was only over here for a very short time; in fact she seems to have come (just like her) out of sheer bravader principally, though she confessed that this was the country to pick up the money in. Well, we thought, as she'd soon be off again, and as she never wrote to you, and as she evidently didn't care to have much to say to old friends, we'd better let her come and go, and be mum about it, and you'd be no wiser than you were before and have nothing to fret about."

"And that's the way you thought of behaving towards *my* sister and Lurley's aunt!" said Mrs. Triggs, looking at her husband with eyes that blazed with indignation.

"And, pray, what might *you* be thinking of doing?" asked Mr. Triggs sullenly.

"I!" answered Mrs. Triggs sharply; "why I shall beg her to leave her present life, and offer her a sister's love and a home with us," she continued passionately.

"Not if *I* know it," replied Mr. Triggs sternly; "that's another reason for not mentioning the matter to you; that woman's not coming nigh *my* little gal, to use her influence over *her*."

Mrs. Triggs glared at him, but did not utter a word for some seconds; at last she said, in a subdued tone:

"First of all, I'll go to-night and make sure that it is Lurline."

"Do," said Mr. Triggs doggedly; "I'll go with you; I think I'd better."

"Perhaps it *would* be better," she rejoined dreamily.

And so it was arranged.

When Mr. and Mrs. Triggs presented themselves at the doors of the theatre, they were informed that there was no room to be had, so great was the rush to see and hear the celebrated Madame Latouche. But Mr. and Mrs. Triggs were neither of them the sort of persons to be easily repulsed on any occasion, much less on an occasion when they were dead set upon a certain purpose.

They, neither of them, understood the Latin language, but they were, both of them, thoroughly pervaded with the spirit of the saying: *Vincere si cupias, auratis utere telis*; and to such effect did they ply those gilded weapons that, though there was not a seat, in the legitimate sense, vacant throughout the theatre, two chairs, in spite of the Lord Chamberlain (if the matter came at that time within his province) and of frowns and grins and muttered objections on the part of the persons inconvenienced, were placed for them in a position where they had an opportunity of combining the performance on the stage in front of them with that of a current of air behind them.

They had some little time to wait in feverish expectation. The piece was "La Grande Duchesse;" and Mrs. Triggs held with trembling fingers the opera-glass through which she was prepared to scan the features of her who was to take the part of the grand-duchess.

To Mrs. Triggs the loves of Fritz and Wanda, the comic ferocity of General Boum, the grotesque array of the army, were a mere impertinence. Impatiently she waited until, to the familiar sound of the military music, and amidst a perfect storm of applause, the soldiers presented arms at the appearance of Son Altesse. Son Altesse was, of course, in riding-habit, with her whip in her hand, and with the head-dress and facings of her regiment. The riding-habit showed off her supple form to the greatest advantage; her fair hair, her lovely complexion, her liquid eyes, her brilliant teeth, seemed to borrow fresh beauty from the glow of pleasure with which she came jauntily forward to the footlights, and bowed repeated acknowledgment of repeated plaudits.

The trembling fingers with which Mrs. Triggs had held

her opera-glass became more trembling still and refused their office; she dropped the glass into her lap, and hid her face in her hands. And a memory of former days completely occupied her when the band struck up and the sweetest voice she had ever heard sang out more gaily and more saucily than ever: "Ah! que j'aime les militaires."

Mrs. Triggs remembered the day when she had last heard that air sung; and an echo came back to her of the expression she had used to her sister on that occasion: "Upon my word, Lurley, you sing these things better than the brazen woman we heard at the theatre; you'll never want a profession so long as questionable operettas are in vogue." She sat spell-bound, until the song was over; and then she turned to Mr. Triggs, saying in a faint voice: "I must go."

Mr. Triggs went out with her at once, and said not a word until they were on the way home, and then he asked curiously:

"Are you satisfied?"

"There is not a doubt about it," answered his wife with a sob: "I scarcely needed to look; one glance was sufficient: there was no mistaking that face and that figure; and the very voice would have been enough."

"And now what do you mean to do?"

"I don't know—I don't know; pray let me think a little," she replied in a troubled voice.

After a little while she recovered her composure. They had driven more than half the way home, however, before she spoke again; and then, looking steadily and haughtily at her husband, she said curtly:

"I shall do as I said."

"I'll not have that woman in *my* house, I tell you," rejoined Mr. Triggs fiercely.

"Why not? There's nothing against her. Those scandalous papers themselves defend her. People are only jealous because she is so beautiful and so clever. But I—I own that I wish she had chosen some other profession."

"Think of our little child; I'm not a-going to have *her* corrupted."

"I *do* think of her, God bless her; I would shield her from harm with my life, and God knows it. But I cannot desert

my sister. Husband and child are dearer than a sister; but a sister, and an only sister, is almost more sacred. Pray don't misunderstand me if I say that other relationships may be replaced, but the relationship between children of the same parents never. I only mention the fact to show you how peculiarly sacred it appears to me."

Mr. Triggs shrugged his shoulders and said resolutely:

"I'm not a-going to have her, and that's flat. She may be as right as the mail, so fur as character goes, for all I know, but I know that you never throw dirt but some of it sticks, and there's been a deal o' queer talk, if nothing else about her. Besides, she's got a lot of swell acquaintances—mostly men, I hear—and *they* wouldn't do for *us*. No, no," he concluded gently, "better leave Madam to go as she came, unless the Captin turns up again and makes all square with her."

"I have told you my intention," replied Mrs. Triggs coldly, "and I mean to abide by it."

"Do you!" exclaimed Mr. Triggs vehemently; "and so do I by mine, so help me God."

And so they drove home without exchanging another word.

Next day Mrs. Triggs wrote a long letter, addressed to "Madame Latouche," under cover to Mr. Tribe, requesting that it might be forwarded to the proper address. It will be sufficient to say that the letter was couched in the most tender and affectionate terms, though the writer regretted the profession to which Mrs. Davies had devoted her talents, pointed out the dangers of that course, alluded to the manner in which she was paraded and written about, without regard for her privacy or feelings, and with an under-current of the grossest insinuations, in the public papers, and implored her to withdraw at once from a position so compromising. The letter concluded with an assurance that the consent of Mrs. Davies to share her sister's home at Notting Hill was all that was required to remove the latter's scruples about occupying the house in which they had spent so much of their earlier life together, and with a request that Mrs. Davies would, as soon as possible, send word where and when she would receive a visit from her sister.

Three or four days elapsed, to the great disquietude of Mrs.

Triggs, and then, to her astonishment and grief, her letter was returned to her, together with the following curt note :

“ Madame Latouche présente ses civilités à Mrs. Triggs, qui paraît avoir commis une petite erreur en adressant à Madame Latouche une lettre destinée, à ce qu'on doit supposer, pour les mains d'une tout autre dame. Dans ces circonstances, Madame Latouche ne se donne pas la peine de relever les termes injurieux que Mrs. Triggs a cru devoir employer en parlant du métier dont Madame Latouche a l'honneur de faire partie. Madame Latouche se borne à rendre la lettre pour qu'elle soit renvoyée à sa vraie destination. Quant à la visite que Mrs. Triggs se propose de faire, dans la situation où sont les choses, une telle démarche devient naturellement impossible ; cela va sans dire.”

Mrs. Triggs could scarcely believe her eyes. Such cool, heartless effrontery she could not have imagined. And yet, as she thought over the letter and the time that had elapsed between the receipt of it and the despatch of her own, it occurred to her that perhaps her sister had gone through no slight struggle, and had determined upon the desperate step she had taken as the best means of avoiding painful scenes and of letting it be known once for all that she had chosen her own line and meant to adhere to it. Perhaps she had herself reflected that her way of life was not one which it would be for her niece's advantage to become acquainted with ; and that, as she did not intend to abandon it, the most advisable course would be to ignore her own identity and sever herself completely from her relatives. She would thus, at any rate, spare both herself and them a great deal of useless argument and a great deal of distressing altercation.

When Mr. Triggs learnt the nature of her reply, he was moved to a rough sort of admiration.

“ She's got a good pluck,” he declared emphatically ; “ I will say that for her. She and the Captiving were well matched there. She goes the whole hog, and no mistake. She never was one to ask favours of anybody ; if she took 'em, she took 'em as if she was doing *you* a favour. She always went her own way ; and she never hid her likes and dislikes, even when

she might lose by showing 'em. She always turned up her nose at *me*, from the fust; and I'll do her the justice to say she turned it up just as much when I had my foot upon her, so to speak, as she did when I was her very 'umble servant. For my part, I'm glad she has took the line she has; it'll save everybody a lot o' trouble, and it'll save you and me, p'r'aps, from coming to loggerheads. You've done what you could; and we shall be able now to move to Notting Hill in six months, without any more of your curious fancies. Depend upon it, Madam didn't like the idea of giving up her swell company, her lords, and what not for I happen to know that, though the lords don't take their ladies to see her, she has her drawing-room full of all sorts of bigwigs. And that was always to her like the breath of her nostrils."

Mrs. Triggs said nothing; but she had not yet given up the contest. She resolved to attempt a personal interview. But Mr. Tribe, by order, refused to give her the address of Madame Latouche, who had herself omitted, purposely no doubt, to put any sort of address upon her note. With great reluctance Mrs. Triggs made application at the theatre itself, and was informed, for her pains, that the private address of Madame Latouche was not given to anybody under any circumstances, but that a letter or any written communication would be faithfully forwarded to her. Mrs. Triggs even meditated waylaying Madame Latouche on the road to or from the theatre, but abandoned the idea for fear of the possible consequences, which might lead to undesirable publicity, and perhaps to some public scandal. At last she was reduced to writing a final appeal, to be forwarded through Mr. Tribe.

"Lurline! Lurline!" she wrote, "how can you be so cold and cruel and hard-hearted as to deny yourself, and your sister, and your little niece? As if I did not know you at the first glance. I went to your theatre on purpose to see if I had been correctly informed about you, and I did not need my eyes to assure me that I had; my ears acknowledged you at the first sound of your voice, my heart recognised you at the first note you uttered, and the recollection of old times so overpowered me, that I could hardly refrain

from calling out. If you *will* ignore us, if you insist upon having no communication with me and with Lurlietta, who scarcely allows a week to pass without inquiring after you, I can't, of course, compel you to change your determination. Only pray remember this: if at any time trouble should come upon you, or if at any time the unwholesome excitement, the questionable splendour, and the perilous triumphs of your present life should pall upon you, you have a sister who can never forget that you and she are the only children of the same parents, and who will always have open for you her heart and her home. She, who judges of you by herself, and believes that in you and in herself there are, at bottom, the same sentiments of honour and pride, never has listened, and never will listen, to the whispers and base insinuations of scandal; she will be convinced by nothing but your own solemn assertion to the contrary that your conduct and your associations have ever been such as to place a barrier between her and her child on the one side and you on the other. But if, which God forbid, it be so, she, judging from herself and her own loyal feelings towards you, and trusting that you, at the very worst, would be like-minded towards her, would rely upon you to make for yourself the fatal statement, and put an end for ever to this horrible suspense."

Mrs. Triggs had probably never even heard of Antigone, but with Antigone's spirit she was to a certain extent imbued, and her noble tendencies had been fostered, and at the same time softened, by her maternal experiences. She did not and could not *love* her sister as she loved her child, but, as regarded her *duty* towards her sister, she could see and feel, as indeed she had seen and felt and expressed, the force of the argument advanced by Antigone:

Πόσις μὲν ἂν μοι καθανόντος ἄλλος ᾔην,
Καὶ παῖς ἀπ' ἄλλου φωτός, εἰ τοῦδ' ἤμπλακον,
Μητρὸς δ' ἐν "Αἰδου καὶ πατρὸς κεκευθότοι
Οὐκ ἔστ' ἀδελφὸς ὅστις ἂν βλάστοι ποτέ.

And, of course, the argument would apply as much to a sister as to a brother.

Mr. Triggs was unable to understand either the sentiment

or the process of reasoning. He contented himself with expressing his satisfaction at the failure of all the efforts made by Mrs. Triggs, as soon as he had heard of them and their failure; and he declared in strong terms that by the time six months were over their heads they would be installed at Notting Hill. In three months the present tenants would be gone; and three months more would suffice for the necessary alterations, or, as Mr. Triggs more graphically expressed it, "to clean their mess up after 'em, and make a new start."

Nor was he displeased at an incident which occurred to help him on his way and to make things smooth and comfortable. For, soon after Mrs. Triggs had sent her note of appeal, already quoted from, the newspapers contained the following announcement:

"We regret to state that the popular and gifted Madame Latouche's engagement in London has come to an abrupt and premature conclusion. She has been suddenly summoned abroad, to Trieste, it is said, on urgent private affairs. She started yesterday at a few hours' notice."

Mrs. Triggs had lately paid great attention to paragraphs of this kind, and she read the announcement with such feelings as may be imagined. She was far away in the regions of divination, trying to guess of what nature the "urgent private affairs" might be, when she came to herself with a start at the familiar question:

"Any news of Aunt Lurley, mamma?"

"I've not heard a word from her, darling," was the somewhat evasive answer.

"No, but I thought, from the way you looked, there might be something about her in the paper," rejoined the child.

Mrs. Triggs assumed an air of surprise and even alarm.

"Eh?" she exclaimed in astonishment.

"She's—not—dead—is she?" whispered the child, turning quite white, and with two tears moistening her eyes.

"No, dear, no," answered Mrs. Triggs with a tender smile, as she smoothed the child's hair and kissed her eager face; "her name is not in the paper at all."

And no more was said upon the subject.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

TOO LATE.

Six months soon pass with the busy and the prosperous; six months are an age with the idle and the destitute. Time goes like a horse which is distressed or overpressed, half feeble trot and half spasmodic gallop, fore-legs and hind-legs at a different pace. With Mr. Triggs the months had gone like the twinkling of an eye; with our old acquaintance, Perkins, and his wife, they had gone like the last drop of liquid in an upturned bottle—the drop that slides slowly, in a thin line, along the side of the bottle, and twists, and lingers, at every little protuberance, and pauses awhile at the curve of the shoulder, and then straggles along the neck and pauses again at the edge of the aperture, to assume its globular shape, before it yields to an irresistible law. For both Triggs and Perkins the last day of the six months had come; and both Triggs and Perkins were about to change their abode. The evening of that day would find Mr. Triggs comfortably installed in the house he had coveted at Notting Hill; and the same evening would find that Perkins too had accomplished a “fitting” to more eligible premises, it may be hoped, than he had yet inhabited. His choice had lain between them and the workhouse; and he must not be severely blamed if he had preferred the former. They were a long way off to be sure, and he knew nothing about the locality where they were situated, beyond what he had read and been told about it; but he had some reason to believe that there

were many mansions there, and he had some ground for hoping that there was a place prepared for him.

Things had not gone prosperously, as most men count prosperity, with Perkins and his wife, since last we encountered them. They were then, both of them, advanced in years; and for elderly people who have lost their means of subsistence, there is not much opening in a world where the young and the strong have a hard enough battle to fight. Odd jobs they obtained from time to time; but on odd jobs an elderly couple can hardly keep body and soul together. Their friend and fellow-lodger, Mrs. Maggitt, had, much to her regret and much to theirs, but in obedience to acknowledged necessity, been obliged to leave them to undertake a permanent charge, in the home of one of her former nurslings, where she would be sure of a maintenance to the end of her days. With her they had for some time kept up a constant correspondence; but, after a while it had ceased. For the poor souls—as happens with the very poor—had been bandied from post to pillar and pillar to post, changing their residence so often, while they descended from bad to worse, that it was difficult and almost impossible to follow their movements, and they themselves shrank from telling their old friend of their necessities and trespassing upon her generosity. For a similar reason they had abstained from representing their sad plight to their son, whose letters, few and far between, and sent from some outlandish place in Russia, spoke of himself as being so flourishing, and of them as being, no doubt, so well appreciated and so properly considered, after their many years' service, that they had not the heart, for a long, long while, to undeceive him. They were agreed that, considering the distance at which he was away from home, the knowledge of their sufferings and privations and troubles would be likely to unsettle him and worry him, and perhaps unfit him for his duties; and they therefore took advantage of the injunction he had laid upon them when he wrote: "I know that letter-writing is not much in your way, so don't feel bound to write unless you've something particular to say. You are not likely to forget me, and I never forget you, night or day.

There's a deal of time wasted in mere letter-writing." But when he wrote to them to say that he would be coming home on leave of absence within a year or eighteen months, they had felt bound to keep him no longer in the dark as to their altered condition. Still they so worded their communication as to cause him as little alarm as possible. Then had arrived the crisis of their fate, when they had been driven from one hole and corner to another, in such rapid succession, that to track them had become all but impossible. And to that they were inclined to attribute the fact that they had received no letter from him. Lastly, poor Perkins had been taken dangerously ill, and, as Mrs. Perkins was obliged to nurse him, there was nobody to call, at the various places at which they had lodged, to inquire after letters. This was the more serious blow to them in that their resources had been almost entirely confined, of late, to the small presents which their son had sent them from time to time at intervals of several months. It is true that a kind-hearted neighbour would occasionally call at one or another of their previous abodes and make the necessary inquiries; but time could not be spared to visit all the addresses, and such visits as were paid were paid in vain. And naturally enough; for not only had the poor souls remained so short a time at each lodging as to have in many cases quickly passed out of remembrance, but the keepers of the lodgings were generally either callous and altogether careless about their late tenants, or were themselves too much harassed and troubled to have leisure or patience for the affairs of others: so that they would simply return letters to the postman with the remark that they had nobody of the name in their house, and didn't know where the people had gone to.

And thus it came to pass that on the morning of the day when Mr. Triggs would sleep for the first time in his new house, the wintry wind played an appropriate accompaniment to the following scene. It was the 29th of December, exactly three months from Michaelmas Day, the day on which the tenants of the house at Notting Hill had removed to make room for Mr. Triggs and family. There was just sufficient

daylight to reveal the general squalor of a small upper room in a miserable house at the East End of London. In the room were, by way of furniture, but three rush-bottomed chairs, a small table, a bed, without a bedstead, on the ground, and a few miscellaneous articles, such as a wash-hand-stand, a towel-horse, and a coal-scuttle. In the grate, as if by way of mockery, blazed merrily a ruddy, cheerful fire; and on the little table, as if by way of further mockery, stood wine and jellies and beef-tea and grapes and all the little luxuries and nicknacks with which the rich and well-to-do are wont to tempt a sick man's appetite. The fire, with its leaping flames and glowing coal, cast a shifting light upon three faces—of a sick man lying on the bed, of a young, bronzed, healthy-looking man, seated at the bottom of the bed, and of a grave, elderly, patient-looking man seated on one side of the bed. On the other side, near the head of the bed and with her back towards the fire, knelt, on the floor, a gray-haired, careworn, pinched-looking woman, so that it was only now and then, when she moved her head, that the light from the fire played over her wan features. The sick man, who lay upon the bed, was little more than a skeleton; and his eyes were so sunken within their dark-rimmed sockets that the squint from which he had suffered all his life was hardly noticeable. There was a smile upon his thin lips, and he talked freely but in a very low voice. On the young man at the foot of the bed, who was dressed in dark blue and wore a peaked cap with two brass buttons, one on each side of the peak, the sort of costume worn frequently by a certain class of engineers, he seemed to concentrate his looks and thoughts, and more than once he muttered: "Bless the lad!"

"Too late! father; I've come too late," said the young man with a groan.

"No, no," said the sick man, smiling affectionately; "you've come just in time; I only wanted to see you once more; and now I shall depart in peace."

"You do depart in peace?" asked the grave man, evidently a clergyman, who sat at the bedside.

The sick man nodded assent.

"Have you anything on your mind?"

The sick man shook his head negatively.

"No ill-will towards anybody?"

Again the sick man shook his head negatively.

"Any misgivings?"

The sick man looked a little doubtful and troubled.

"If you have," said the clergyman, "let me hear them."

"Well, sir," said the sick man, with a sad smile, "there's one thing that has always puzzled me."

"What is it?"

"Shall we rise with the same bodies?"

"No: with glorified bodies."

"No hunger, and thirst, and cold, and suffering?"

"Oh no; nothing of the kind."

"Pray don't think bad of me for asking. I've suffered—and so's she," he added, touching tenderly the hand of the woman at his side; "oh! sir, we've suffered—agonies."

"You have indeed, my good man," replied the clergyman gently; "but that is all over."

"You see, sir," resumed the sick man, in a scarcely audible voice and with a wistful look at the clergyman, "it says that He—you know—that He, who was the first to rise from the dead, rose with His body—as it was afore—and that—He did eat—with his disciples—a bit of a broiled fish and of an honey-comb."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, if there's eating after the resurrection there's most likely hunger; and if there's hunger, there's most likely thirst; and then cold and so on; till it'll be only this world over again;" and the sick man shuddered violently, gasping for breath.

"My dear friend," said the clergyman soothingly, "be of good cheer; you are the last person in the world to deny that the Almighty is a reasonable being, and there would be no object in removing us from the conditions of this life simply to bring us back to the same again."

There was a silence of some minutes; and then the voice of the sick man was heard, hollow but distinct, saying:

"Read! read!"

The clergyman read from the Litany, which he had been reading from time to time at the sick man's request. He had just finished the sentences praying for deliverance from every kind of evil, when he paused, seeing that the sick man lay apparently unconscious.

Suddenly the sick man's voice was heard, clear and distinct, praying aloud :

"From such another world as this, Good Lord deliver us!"

And three voices answered solemnly :

"Amen! Amen! Amen!"

The clergyman, you see, was unbeneficed.

Then there was another pause; and with a deep sigh, as of one who finds relief, the sick man turned his face to the wall, and yielded up the ghost.

The clergyman rose up from his seat, and, with a tremulous "God bless and comfort you, my friends," took his departure, leaving mother and son alone with their grief.

When the first passionate burst of sorrow was over, the mother turned to her son, and said tenderly, regarding him through her tears :

"James, my boy, this is a sad home for you to come back to."

"Not so sad as it has been for you, mother, I fear," answered the young man; "I only wish I had been a week sooner."

"I don't think it would have made any difference, James; so far, I mean, as—as—as *he* was concerned;" and once more her grief overpowered her.

"The doctor seemed to think it would," replied the son gloomily; "he said that nourishment taken in time would—have—saved—my poor father."

"I don't think it, James. Your poor father was wore out. I don't say but what he might have been alive longer; but he'd only have lingered, he'd never have been about again."

"And you say he found no fault with me or with anybody?"

"With *you*? Not he; nor with anybody else. I never

heard him speak a bitter word even against the cause of all our miseries."

"That man Triggs?"

"Aye; and the poor soul used to say he hoped we didn't show too proud a stomach in not applying to that Triggs or his wife for help, and in refusing to go into the house. But we *couldn't* do either one or the other; to separate would ha' killed us. You have your feelings stronger, it seems to me, when you've nothing else belonging to you, and when people seem to think you didn't ought to have any at all."

James Perkins—for of course it was he—made no reply. He mused a long while, and his pleasant, open, manly face grew disagreeable to look upon as he mused. At length he asked abruptly and harshly:

"Where does this Triggs live?"

"I don't know; but the place o' business is where it was, in Thames Street, you know."

James Perkins muttered something about "too many people in a place like that."

"Oh!" exclaimed his mother, as an idea struck her, "Mr. Tribe could tell you. But what's the use of knowing? It can't matter to *us* where *he* lives."

"I should rather like to know," replied the son; "just give me Mr. Tribe's address. He's the lawyer that you were telling me about, who was kind to you."

"Yes, he was very kind for a lawyer; many's the little job he's got us to do."

And she instructed her son where he would find Mr. Tribe.

Upon him James Perkins determined to call that very day, and at once, in fact, when he had paid the necessary visit to the undertaker's and elsewhere.

Mr. Tribe was at home in his chambers, and, when he learnt who his visitor was, received the young man with considerable cordiality.

"I have always had a great respect for your father," he said; "and I think he has been very badly treated by the world."

"At any rate, *you* have made up for that, as much as *you* could," replied James Perkins gratefully.

"And how *is* your father?" asked Mr. Tribe cheerily.

"He—died—a few hours ago," was the answer, in a low voice.

Mr. Tribe sprang from his seat.

"What! How! What the devil d'ye mean?" he exclaimed aghast. "No, no; don't say that; don't, pray don't."

"It's only too true, sir," said James Perkins.

"My good fellow," rejoined Mr. Tribe, with much feeling, "you distress me dreadfully. Pray tell me all about it."

And James Perkins told the whole sad story. How his father and mother had come down to the very dregs of poverty; and how the father had succumbed to illness, brought on by privation, within forty-eight hours of the son's arrival from abroad, with ample means at his command.

"I take it as extremely unkind of Perkins," whimpered Mr. Tribe, much affected, "not to have applied to me; damnably unkind, though he wouldn't have liked to hear me say so. And, pray, may I ask what you are by profession?"

"I'm an engineer; I have the management of some works in Russia, and I've come home on leave of absence."

"I daresay they pay you well?"

"Very handsomely; and it adds to my sorrow to think that I might have made my parents comparatively comfortable all these years if I had known, before it was too late, the plight to which they were reduced. But I wished to save enough to leave Russia altogether."

"And, pray, how can I be of any service to you?"

"I merely want you to give me the private address of Mr. Triggs, under whom my father served for many years."

"Did your father complain to you of his treatment at the hands of Mr. Triggs?"

"Never."

"He didn't?"

"No. And though I happen to know from my mother that their misfortunes were traceable to the malicious persecution of this man Triggs, she declares that my father, so far from speaking ill of him, would not even listen to her just denunciations of him."

"Your father," replied Mr. Tribe, "had some of the strangest notions in the world; I never knew him abuse anybody; he wouldn't even overreach anybody in the way of business, if he ever got a chance; and I do believe that he prayed for them that spitefully used him, just as if the literal interpretation of Scripture were not exploded in these enlightened days. *You* don't hold to the literal interpretation?" he concluded with a curious, piercing look at the young man.

"I can't say I do," rejoined James Perkins, setting his teeth hard and tightening his hand upon a stick he carried.

"What a nice stick!" exclaimed Mr. Tribe, as if it had just caught his eye; "what is it made of?"

"Vine."

"Ah! that's a tough plant; doesn't break easily, and hurts frightfully. But, by-the-way, you want the private address of Mr. Triggs?"

"If you please."

"Well, oddly enough, he changes his address this very day. His wife and his little daughter moved yesterday into Portico House, Notting Hill, and he goes there to-day; you can't miss it; it's in the direct high-road; anybody will point it out to you, even if you shouldn't discover it for yourself from the size of the portico. I hardly know whether I ought to ask you when you think of calling, and whether you have any particular business."

"Why?"

"Because to-night he has a great party, a housewarming, to celebrate his establishment in his new house; I am going to be one of the guests. Now, as you want his *private* address, and as he is always, of course, away from home at his business in the City during the day, you would naturally call either early in the morning before he goes out, or late in the evening after he has dined; and to-night, as you may imagine, he would hardly be likely to admit anybody on business. Whereas, to-morrow he's not likely to go out so early in the morning: if you were there by ten, you'd be pretty sure to find him."

"Thank you ; then I think I will call to-morrow morning. And now I will wish you good-day."

"Good-day ; I'm very glad to have seen you ; and I shall hope to see you again. What a fine, powerful young man you look !"

"Oh ! I'm pretty well for that," was the answer, with a careless laugh.

"You never saw Mr. Triggs ?"

"Never."

"Well, *he* is a very fine, powerful man, too ; more powerful, I should say, than you are yourself. He's an ugly customer," continued Mr. Tribe significantly, as he took young Perkins by the arm and walked with him to the door : "and the law is another ugly customer ; and he doesn't hesitate to employ either or both of these ugly customers in his defence or for his satisfaction. If you don't see any point in these observations of mine, you can consider me intoxicated, if you like ; it will not be the first time by a long way that the stigma (if it be a stigma to be placed in the same boat with Noah and Lot among the Patriarchs, with Burns among poets, with Sheridan among wits, with the First Gentleman of Europe among persons of quality, and, in fact, with the tip-top men in the world) has been attached to me, and that by no less a personage than the great Mr. Triggs himself. So, good-bye, my young friend ; and *do* let me have a call from you again soon."

"Good-bye, sir ; and many thanks to you for your kindness to my father," said young Perkins earnestly.

"Oh ! no, not at all," replied Mr. Tribe ; "no thanks are due to *me* : I only wish I could have done more. I really *do* admire that stick of yours. By-the-way, talking of sticks, our friend Mr. Triggs, or, I beg pardon, I *should* say *my* friend Mr. Triggs, got a terrible blow over the head from a stick some years ago."

"Did he !" exclaimed young Perkins, eagerly ; "it's a pity it didn't kill him."

"It didn't quite do that," replied Mr. Tribe coolly, "but it did very nearly ; and it has left its effects behind, as the

doctors said it would do. Mr. Triggs is as powerful a man, muscularly, as ever; but any sort of excitement is dangerous to him. I don't know what they call the particular malady he suffers from, but I know that under any sort of excitement, especially mental, he's liable to go off like a pricked bladder. However, that's neither here nor there—nothing to do with you or me. So, once more, good-bye. Remember me kindly to your good mother, and give her my condolence.”

And Mr. Tribe, with a hearty shake of the hand, dismissed his visitor.

Of course a doctor had to certify the cause of Perkins' death. Now, if it should appear to anybody possible or grossly improbable that, in London, misfortune to the extent of starvation should overtake so respectable and inoffensive a couple as Perkins and his wife, let the sceptic ponder upon the following two extracts from one of the most respectable London newspapers, dated Oct. 24, 1876. The extracts are but a sample of many that might be had for the seeking. Here is one, representing the bare facts elicited at an inquest:

“**DEATH FROM STARVATION.**—Yesterday afternoon Mr. W. J. Payne, the coroner for the City and Southwark, held an inquiry at the board-room of the workhouse, Mint Street, Borough, into the circumstances connected with the death from starvation of Ann Carney, aged seventy-five. Mary Ann Holloway stated that, although she frequently had held conversations with the deceased and her husband, she had not learned their means of subsistence, they being very reticent and peculiar in their manner, but she considered them to be wretchedly poor. On Friday last she was called in by the husband and found the deceased dead on an old mattress on the floor, there being little else in the room, which presented a most poverty-stricken appearance. She at once summoned a doctor, who pronounced life to be extinct, and the body was removed to the mortuary. Henry Carney said he was eighty-five years of age, and had been a wholesale leather merchant carrying on business in Little Guildford Street, Southwark. Through misfortunes

they had drifted into a dreadful state of poverty, and his wife being afflicted with paralysis they could do nothing for a living. Their income was very uncertain, and the most they could at any time depend upon was three shillings and sixpence a week, which they had from the parish, and about ten shillings once a month from the relatives of his deceased wife. The deceased had gradually drooped during the last few months, and on Friday last on his return from the relief-office with their weekly allowance he found her lying dead, half upon the floor and half upon the mattress. In reply to questions by the coroner, the poor old man, who was broken down with grief, said that out of the sum described by him as their income they had to pay three shillings and sixpence a week for rent. They lived principally upon bread and butter and bread and milk, and had done so for many months. It was so long a time since they had tasted any meat that he could not call to his memory when they had any in the house. The total amount of food which had passed his wife's lips for two or three days prior to her death was two Abernethy biscuits. He had represented his destitute condition to the parish officials, and had been told that what they were doing was the most they could do for him unless he came into the workhouse, but neither of them could bring their minds to such a course. Mr. Thomas Donahoo, surgeon, Blackfriars Road, said he was called in and found the deceased quite dead. The body was in a shockingly emaciated condition, the bones almost protruding through the skin. The *post-mortem* examination showed the intestines, both large and small, to be perfectly empty, and evidently nothing had passed into them for two or three days. The bloodless condition of the body and the total absence of fat in the tissues showed that she had been literally starved to death, and there was nothing else to account for the death. The jury returned a verdict of 'Death from starvation.' "

And here is the other, containing the editorial comments upon the facts:

" 'Death from starvation' is unfortunately not so rare a

verdict for a coroner's jury in this country as of itself to call for our special wonder. But there was something melancholy almost beyond the experience of recent days in the story of a death by starvation which was told yesterday to the coroner for the City and Southwark. The victim was a woman seventy-five years of age. Her husband, who was ten years older, had once, it seemed, been a wholesale leather merchant. He had been unfortunate in business and he became poor. His wife became paralysed, and the poor old husband had to attend to her, and they sank into abject poverty. A long life had conducted them only to this. They could do nothing for a living. The parish allowed them three shillings and sixpence a week, and the poor woman's relatives gave them about ten shillings a month. This latter sum was practically all they had to live on, inasmuch as their rent absorbed the money allowed them by the parish. They lived for months on bread and milk, and the old man said he could not call to memory when they had tasted any meat. For two or three days before her death the woman had had no food but two Abernethy biscuits. As a matter of course she died. Time and hunger against any two, not to say any one, in such a case. What strikes us as inexplicable is that nothing should have been done to save her. It is true that the pair are described as having been 'very reticent and peculiar' in their talk with their neighbours, and that they seemed unwilling to say anything about what is paradoxically called their 'means of subsistence.' It is true, too, that the parish officers told the old man they could make him no larger outdoor allowance, and that he and his wife, with that remnant of pride which one can hardly censure, refused to go into the workhouse. But could no parish officer have even mentioned the case to any benevolent organisation; to any clergyman; to any charitable person; to any of the neighbours even? If a woman is too poor to pay for food, and the parish cannot allow her out of doors enough to eat, and she will not enter the workhouse, must she be allowed to die, in London? Are the parish authorities simply to announce their rules, and then withdraw and wait for the inquest?"

And for those who die of starvation, followed by an inquest, there are ten times as many who die, like Perkins, of starvation, followed by no inquest, because, in the latter case, the appearance of a relative upon the scene at the last moment, or the intervention of something or somebody, prevents inquiry and provides a loophole of escape from a disagreeable necessity. A doctor may be certain in his own mind that the ultimate assistance came too late, but he cannot deny that while there is life there is hope; he has to give full force to that consideration; and the medical phraseology has many terms which will enable him to satisfy his conscience without bringing about a public investigation.

And so Perkins was certified to have died of something with a Greek name, which would have been as unintelligible to him in life as it was indifferent to him in death.

CHAPTER XL.

DOWNSTAIRS AND UP.

AT 1 P.M., or thereabouts, on that 29th of December on which Mr. Triggs was to sleep (very soundly, no doubt) in his new abode, full justice was being done to an ample repast spread upon a long table which occupied the middle of a comfortable room, with a blazing fire, in the lower regions of Portico House, Notting Hill. At one end of the table sat a slim, tall, sallow-faced, alert-looking man, of consequential air, about thirty years of age, dressed in black, wearing a white cravat and highly-polished pumps with buckles of metal which shone like silver. At the other end sat a plump, rosy, comfortable-looking woman, about thirty-five years of age apparently, and very neatly dressed in a dark stuff-gown, with scrupulously white linen cuffs or wristbands, giving an air of simple finish to her sleeves. At the sides of the table sat three or four girls of various ages from seventeen to five or six and twenty. These personages formed the body of the domestics engaged for the service of the house with the portico at Notting Hill. Some of them had resided with Mr. and Mrs. Triggs "out Clapham way" and had merely migrated; others were quite new acquisitions. They had all, however, been settled at Portico House for some few days, having moved thither in advance of Mrs. Triggs, who had merely kept her own maid with her at Balham, and sent the other servants on to make things "ship-shape," as Mr. Triggs said, at Notting Hill, temporary assistance having in the meanwhile been procured for all that was necessary to be done at Balham.

And now they were taking together, according to custom, their substantial midday meal at one o'clock, but in a state of more than usual excitement, inasmuch as Mrs. Triggs and Lurlietta had moved into the house the evening before, and Mr. Triggs was expected that very day.

It may be as well to offer a few words of explanation touching the matronly woman and the consequential man who sat at the two ends of the table.

The matronly woman was Mrs. Wells, so far as the domestics of the establishment were concerned, and, more briefly, Wells with Mr. and Mrs. Triggs and Lurlietta. She had discharged various functions, undefined, "out Clapham way;" having been partly nurse, partly wardrobe-keeper, partly superintendent-general, and, in many respects, acting as deputy to Mrs. Triggs, to whom she was very much attached, and for whose husband, as a fine, handsome, self-assertive man, and a merchant of great substance, she felt the most unfeigned respect, not unmixed with awe. She had come in much the same capacity to Portico House; but she had advantages superior to those which she had previously enjoyed. She was to receive higher wages, and she had her own room, adjoining the kitchen indeed but reserved exclusively for herself. Hence her fellow-servants, both those who had migrated with her from "out Clapham way," and those who had been engaged in addition, to make up the complement of the number considered necessary for the larger and more lordly mansion at Notting Hill, had bestowed the name of housekeeper's-room on the said apartment and of housekeeper on the person who occupied it, though neither Mrs. Wells herself nor Mrs. Triggs had assumed or mentioned any such style and title.

The consequential man who faced her at the dinner-table was Mr. Charles Mullins, otherwise simple Mullins, who was the first specimen of a man-servant, save the half-gardener, half man-servant at Balham, Mr. and Mrs. Triggs had ever admitted into their household. But their position had altered; and certainly, so far as appearances went, he was a credit to them. He, too, had his private room, or "pantry," and was

dubbed among his fellow-servants "butler," though, as will soon be seen, he had no claim to that designation, and was very sore at the nondescript position assigned to him. Still he had his assuagements; for, as the only man among some half-dozen women and girls, he met with that homage which, whatever people may say about the equality of the sexes, always seems to be paid naturally and as a matter of course by women to any human being, even of the tenderest years, of the masculine gender, in their own rank of life, and which Mrs. Wells herself could not refrain from exhibiting to a certain extent, much as her better nature revolted against the characteristics occasionally displayed by Mr. Mullins. What may be the secret of that homage, whether it arise from an innate sense of inferiority, or from a politic notion of "stooping to conquer," is an open question; but, when there are several women and only one man, it may be accounted for on the ground of the strong competition.

Suffice it to say that Mr. Mullins had homage to any amount from the younger women, who, when Mrs. Wells would look grave and even vexed, giggled openly or gaped with admiration as he, with cool, audacious want of deference, discussed his employers and related anecdotes illustrative of his extensive experience, his selfish philosophy, and his acquaintance with the upper classes. And so on this occasion, a blooming scullery-maid laughed right out with delight, as Mr. Mullins, addressing Mrs. Wells, asked superciliously:

"What time d'ye expect Triggs?"

"Master," replied Mrs. Wells, with some emphasis on the word and with a glance of disapproval at the maid, "may come in at any time; most likely to lunch at two."

"He's a low feller, this Triggs," observed Mr. Mullins sententiously.

"Lor! Mr. Mullins, is he now?" inquired one of the maids, giggling.

"Yes, he is, a dreadful low feller. I twigged him directly, when he engaged me. Drops his haitches, for one thing—that's low; then he engaged me hisself, instead of introducing me to his missis, and letting me talk it over with *her*—that's

low; then he wants me to dress in black, as if I was a mute, and as if he wasn't gen'l'man enough to have a uniform of his own—that's low; then he don't keep only a one-horse broom—that's low; then he says I ain't to hold any partic'lar office, I'm to do just what he asts me, supposin', of course, he don't come it *too* strong; I'm to usher people in at the street-door, I'm not to be a butler or anythink def'nite, and I'm not to have the keys o' the wine-celler—all that's doosid low and mean besides. Altogether," he concluded discontentedly, "I don't think I shall stawp long."

"Perhaps that may not depend entirely upon yourself, Mr. Mullins," rejoined Mrs. Wells, laughing good-humouredly; "but I suppose you've bettered yourself by coming here, and as for wearing black, I have always understood that it was more gentlemanly than a livery."

"Well, if anythink was to happen to Triggs, it'd come in handy," replied Mr. Mullins gloomily; "it's a very disperriting colour; I'd been used to a uniform that kep up your sperrits; horinge inexpressibles and a drab coat with a horinge border, a horinge velvet collar and silver buttons. And, as for bettering myself, it's about six o' one and half-a-dozen o' the other. I'm independent, nobody hover me bar Triggs hisself (I don't count ladies; a gen'l'man is always happy to wait upon a lady), and he's mostly hout, you say; and my selery's higher—a good bit higher—than what it was; but on the other hand, I've come down a many pegs in the social scale. Why, afore I came here, I lived with a dook and a duchess. They didn't call me Mullins, as this low feller Triggs insists upon doing; they called me Chawles, in a friendly way, and I called them 'your Grease.' We moved in circles that was quite dazling; we was in with the Waleses and the Edinburrers and the Christians and hall that lot."

"Christians, Mr. Mullins!" simpered one of the maids; "and what do you take *us* for, pray?"

"Ah! you don't quite onderstand me, I see, miss," answered Mr. Mullins condescendingly; "p'r'aps you'll take my mean-ing better if I say that we used to have a millingterry band a-playin' 'God save the Queen,' on the grand staircase;

heverybody standing hup to receive such hillustrious comp'ny; a hawning right hover the steps; crimson cloth down to the kerbstone; and the pelisse on dooty round the door."

"Dear me! Did you now! What did you leave for?" exclaimed several voices.

"Me and her Grease," replied Mr. Mullins with an air of lofty indifference, "had a few words about a little bit o' paper, and——"

He was interrupted by a tremendous peal at the street-door bell, and an exclamation from Mrs. Wells:

"Why, I do believe there's master, and it's only half-past one; I didn't expect he'd be here before two. Do make haste, Mr. Mullins."

But Mr. Mullins took things very easily; and when a second, more tremendous, peal came to quicken his movements, he remarked to the company generally, as he sauntered slowly out of the room:

"Triggs a-tryin' the strength of his new bell-wires, I should say."

Some minutes elapsed before Mr. Mullins reappeared; and, when he did reappear, he presented so curious a spectacle that Mrs. Wells asked him what was the matter.

"I said before," replied Mr. Mullins, whose sallow face betrayed symptoms of very recent agitation, "that Triggs was a low feller; and he's not only that—he's a reg'lar rough."

"Why, what did he do to you?" asked Mrs. Wells, unable to repress a smile.

"Do!" replied Mr. Mullins, with a gulp; "first of all he asked me why the devil—that's a pretty expression for a gentleman—he *might* have said 'dooce'—why the devil I didn't come to the door sooner. And then he told me he wanted me upstairs. Upstairs we go into the drawring-room, where there was nobody but ourselves, and he tells me to wait while he looks about the room for something. Whilst he was looking for the something, I leans over the back of a cheer, like this here, in a easy attitooode, and, just as he turns round to give me his instructions, I happens to yawn. Well, he looks as black as thunder, takes two long, heavy steps hup

to me, forces me into a hupright position agin the door, and then, turning me round, asts me if I can see a partic'lar panel jest on a level with my head. Of course I could, quite distinct, and I says so. Then says he, 'Very well: then the next time you stand like that when you're waiting on *me*, and yawn like that when *I* speak to yer, I'll knock yer head through it.' Leastways, he said 'ead'; but I knew what he meant."

Mrs. Wells fairly burst out laughing, as she remarked:

"Then I should advise you to take care, for he's just the sort of man to do it."

"Oh, ~~is~~ he!" sneered Mr. Mullins; "all I know is he turned all sorts of colours, and shook all hover, as soon as he'd said so."

"Ah!" rejoined Mrs. Wells, looking very serious; "he's been subject to that lately. He met with a terrible accident many years ago, and the doctors do say it'll be the death of him yet, if he don't take care of himself and not over-excite himself in any way. Mistress is quite anxious about him sometimes, when he's had an extra glass o' wine or has put himself in a fever any ways."

"Ho! indeed!" snarled Mr. Mullins, as the company, having finished dinner, prepared to separate; "well, as I said before, if anything *was* to happen to him, this here black costoom 'd come in handy. There's that bell again; lunch, o' course; it's like the tread-mill, up and down, up and down."

"Lor; Mr. Mullins, did you ever try it?" rejoined a saucy girl, who immediately repented of her sauciness, when she saw the effect of it.

Mr. Mullins looked awful; his sallow countenance became of a greenish hue and his eyes glared horribly as he sputtered out:

"That's a very onladylike observation, miss."

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, sir," replied the abashed damsel; "I didn't mean anythink; it *was* only my joke."

"A joke's a joke, of course," rejoined Mr. Mullins grimly; "but when you don't mean anythink, it's best to use a double intender."

"I don't know what you mean, sir," stammered the girl: "what is a double intender?"

"Well," replied Mr. Mullins graciously, "it's a joke much

used among the hupper circle ; you say one thing and intend another ; hence the hexpression ; ” and he moved majestically away to his pantry, whilst another giggling girl whispered to her who had been discomfited :

“ You put your foot into it then, Jane ; he’ll never cotton to *you* again.”

And her prophecy appeared to have come true, when at five o’clock the domestics once more met together, this time for tea and muffins, in the comfortable kitchen common to them all. Mr. Mullins treated Jane with marked neglect, though he was unusually affable to all the rest, and regaled them as usual with anecdotes of his experiences.

“ Never no more, Mrs. Wells,” said he, replying to a remark she had made about the differences to be met with in different households, “ shall I have sech a situation again as I had oncet. I was private and partic’lar attendant, some years ago, to a rich young gentleman, as was a great hinvalid. We was always a-travellin’ about together, fust class and no mistake, and me playin’ fust fiddle, in consequence of him being mostly too bad for anythink but to swaller his med’cine ; and he swallered pills enough to set up a horspital, and draughts enough to float a ship. And only me and him together.”

“ But what could his parents have been about,” asked Mrs. Wells, “ to leave him to a young man, as young as you must have been at that time ? ”

“ He was in good hands, Mrs. Wells, you may depend,” answered Mr. Mullins loftily. “ He was—excuse the expression, if it sounds profane—he was what they call Hell Dorador (but why they call it so, I don’t know) to me : and if *I* could ha’ kep’ him alive, he’d a bin alive and kickin’ at this moment. And I don’t use that vulgar expression without a purpose, as you will learn presently. But first, as to what you said about his parents. He never had a mother, so far as I ever heard or knew, being, so fur, like King David ; leastways, I’ve heard say that nobody knows who King David’s mother was ; no more they didn’t his’n. He was an only child, and his father was as rich as Creases (you’ve heard tell of *him*, I dessay), but up to his eyes and more in business, so that he could only pay

us a visit every now and then. Well, that young gentleman, when he *did* have a day's health, was as lively as a kitten; and, as I dessay you've remarked with them that's in generally weak on their limbs, when they do feel their legs, nothing pleased him so much as to use 'em, especially in the way of kickin': and he'd kick *me* over and over, and laugh he would over it till he made hisself ill again. But he always paid: he would out with his pus and give me what he called naterally. considerin' the quantity he stuck about hisself, a plaister. He didn't hurt, bless you, to speak of; but, if you made believe he did, and rubbed yourself a good bit, he'd give you a matter of a sovereign at a time. Same on the hicc in winter: he'd go skatin' (for he could skate beautiful) when he had a day's health, and nothing he liked so much as to trip you up, and, if you pretended to fall pretty heavy and wiped your eyes with your handkercher when you got up, he'd tip you reg'lar princely. Oh! he was a rare young gentleman; and when he died, I wore a hat-band reachin' very near to the crown o' my hat. Ah! I shall never see such days again: they talk o' gettin' more kicks than halfpence, but *I* got a deal more halfpence than kicks."

"You are quite a philosopher, Mr. Mullins," replied Mrs. Wells, with ill-concealed disgust, whilst Jane whispered to her neighbour:

"I *do* believe he *has* tried the treadmill."

However, Mr. Mullins, clouded with his own conceit, went on, addressing the company generally:

"Our line of life, when you do get a good berth, beats every other for ease and comfort. Compare our life," he continued, warming with his subject, "with that of the petty tradesman, or the middlin' classes, and specially the clergy. No rent, no rates, no taxes to pay; the highth o' good livin' and superior lodgin'; throwed very often (bar Triggs and Co.) into the very best society; movin' softly up and down luxuriantly-carpeted staircases and round helegantly furnished rooms, where your feet glide noiseless over the velvety coverin's of the floors, and your face and figure reflec' their-selves in shinin' mirrors (you ladies 'll appreciate *that*), and

where blazin' fires and glitterin' shandy-leers set cold and darkness at defiance, and all at somebody helse's expense. To be constantly agoin' about in spacious, lofty apartments, Mrs. Wells, helps, in my opinion, to make yer feel taller and bigger and grander haltogether, and certainly tends to enlarge the mind, and to fit yer for any spere. You don't feel what they call the movizont that some poor people feel at findin' theirselves in marble halls, as the poet says, and in brilliant comp'ny; it's just what you've been used to, and use, you know, is second nature. And then, when you lay down on your nightly piller, no anxiety, no responsibility! If the house does ketch fire, what's that to *us*, so as we have time to get hout safe? And if thieves *do* break in and steal, as the sayin' is, why, what does it matter to *us*, so as they don't cut *our* throats? Any little property *we* may lose 'll be made good to us by the owners o' the house, or they're no ladies and gentlemen. Not that Triggs," he concluded contemptuously, "would be likely to behave the gentleman, whatever his missis might do."

"Come, Mr. Mullins," said Mrs. Wells, bridling, "you've nothing to say against *her*."

"Certainly not," answered Mr. Mullins, with great alacrity; "*she*'ll do; and how she could bring herself to take up with Triggs I can't think. She's got the reg'lar hair, Triggs's missis has. The fust time she said to me, 'See to it directly, Mullins, I very nigh answered, 'Yes, your Grease;' if she'd said 'Chawles' instead of 'Mullins' I'm sure I should. And then, when she says quietly, 'You can go, Mullins,' she gives you a look, as she says it, so that you can no more help goin', if you've ever such a mind as to stawp, than if you was hoisted hout by the nape o' the neck. And then there's the little gal; if it wasn't for a hexpression she made use of——"

"Now, Mr. Mullins," interrupted Mrs. Wells warningly, "I shall not listen to a word against Miss Lurley——"

"Mrs. Wells," observed Mr. Mullins, with much dignity, "al-low me to finish what I was a-goin' to say. The little gal seems to me to be a partic'lar nice little gal, and calkerlated, if anythink can, to make me stawp in this place. But I did

not like her fust hexpression to me, when they fust came into the house yesterday. Says she to me: 'Are you the new man?' The 'new man!' There's a hexpression! It's all very well in the pulpit of a Sunday; but it gave me quite a turn, not bein' used to be addressed in that language. But she's very young, and will improve. And when I recovered myself sufficiently to say: 'I hope to have the pleasure of waiting upon you, miss,' she puts out her little hand and shakes hands with me, and says, as pretty as can be: 'I like to be friends with everybody, and I hope I shall be with *you*.' Where she got them nice manners from I can't think; not from Triggs, I'll swear, and his missis doesn't seem to be so much in the soft and gentle way."

"Bless her little heart!" rejoined Mrs. Wells; "it's her own kind heart taught her."

"Well, *she*'ll make me stawp, if anythink will," remarked Mr. Mullins, as he rose to answer the bell; "but not if bells are to be rung like this here. Go it, Triggs; you'll not have many chances of ringing for Charles Mullins," he muttered, "if you're a-goin' on like this."

In the meanwhile, the existence of Mr. Mullins had not been altogether ignored upstairs, where Mr. and Mrs. Triggs had been for some time sitting together, and had been subsequently joined by Lurlietta.

"It's a pity you engaged that man, my dear," Mrs. Triggs had said, "without consulting me."

"He's a nasty, insolent brute," answered Mr. Triggs, with a lowering look.

"I hadn't noticed his insolence," observed Mrs. Triggs, in a tone of indifference, "but I have some reason to believe that he is dishonest, and obtained his situation here with a false character."

"Why?" asked Mr. Triggs, with a frown.

Mrs. Triggs, in reply, handed him a note, which he read carefully and returned, with the contemptuous comment:

"I hate anonymous letters and anonymous writers."

"Not more than I do," rejoined Mrs. Triggs quietly; "but that is hardly what you would call an anonymous letter,

though there is no signature. It is in a sort of official form, and it merely says that 'the proper authorities think it right to express a hope that Mrs. Triggs did not engage her new man-servant without making herself well acquainted with his antecedents.'

"Well," remarked Mr. Triggs gruffly, "we haven't missed anything yet; and I don't think he can do much harm before to-morrow—unless he's a murderer as well as a thief. I shouldn't like to have my throat cut," he added, with a guffaw, "the first night of sleeping in my new house."

Mrs. Triggs hid her face with her hand, and shuddered convulsively.

"Why, what's the matter with *you*?" exclaimed Mr. Triggs, in blank astonishment; "you didn't use to be so easy upset. You don't mean to say you're afraid of that Mullins; why, I could throttle him like a baby or a blind puppy."

"Oh, I wish we had never come here, Tom," replied Mrs. Triggs, with grave face and moist eyes; "I have been full of presentiments ever since I set foot in the house. I had a fearful night last night; I scarcely slept at all; and the moment I dozed off, I fancied I heard papa talking angrily to me or Lurline, whispering reproaches, and I woke at once with a start. I feel as if something dreadful were going to happen."

"Come, now, Marietta," said Mr. Triggs sternly; "let us have no more of that. We talked all that over before we came here; and I said enough to prove to any sensible woman, as you used to be, that your misgivings were all rubbish. I've explained to you all you need know about the 'double event'; and to-night I'm going to have a jollification over the winning of it, and I'll trouble you not to be a wet-blanket, but to receive my friends with a merry face."

"Oh! you needn't be afraid of *me*," replied Mrs. Triggs with a touch of her old haughtiness; "I am not in the habit of betraying my feelings in public. But here comes Lurietta."

And with a bound the little maiden dashed into the room, and threw herself down upon a stool at her father's feet. His face brightened at her sprightly looks and vivacious manner, as he asked her abruptly:

"And how did *you* sleep last night, Lurley, eh?"

"Oh, beautifully, papa; like a top—a humming-top; at least, there seemed to be curious, pleasant noises in my ears all night, but when I woke this morning, what do you think?"

"What?"

"Why, I must have been crying in my sleep; my eyes were all wet, and so was my pillow."

"You silly little puss; you'd been dreaming, I suppose."

"Yes," she answered pensively; "I recollected afterwards. I'd been dreaming of Aunt Lurley; and I fancied that she wouldn't speak to me; she kept walking away from me, and, the more I ran after her and called to her, the more she hurried away."

"Oh! indeed; and is *that* all?" remarked Mr. Triggs grimly.

"N-n-o, not quite all," she answered hesitatingly; "I recollected that my dream changed, and that I was at a funeral somewhere—I don't know where and I don't know whose; but I know I saw the hearse and the coaches and the horses and the men in black and the black gloves and the white handkerchiefs and all that, quite distinctly; and I suppose that is why I awoke crying. Oh! I hope it wasn't Aunt Lurley's!"

Mr. Triggs burst into a discordant laugh.

"What with your dreams, Lurley, and what with your mother's presentiments," he said with a gloomy look in the direction of Mrs. Triggs, "this house doesn't seem to have a very cheerful effect upon a body. I suppose," he concluded with a sneer, "something or other will happen to *me* in *my* sleep. But," he added after a certain interruption and with a significant glance at his wife, "if it's nothing very serious I'll attend to that feller's business to-morrow."

"That feller" was, of course, Mr. Mullins, who, as we are aware, had been rung for and had just quitted the room with the injunction laid upon him:

"Have everything ready by nine o'clock sharp, Mullins."

Whereupon Mr. Triggs, having wished Lurley good-night, as he was obliged to go out to transact some business, left mother and daughter together.

The evening wore on; Lurley was put to bed, and Mrs.

Triggs proceeded to array herself and compose her countenance for the proper reception of her husband's guests.

The first of them to come was Mr. Dan Tribe. He arrived soon after eight o'clock, whilst Mrs. Triggs was employed in her preparations; but his arrival at that time was premeditated, and, indeed, prearranged with Mr. Triggs, with whom he had some important matters to talk over, and into whose study he was at once ushered. Mr. Triggs, having returned from his business, was already there, fully dressed—at least, as fully dressed as his notions upon such subjects seemed to require. When the two men had sufficiently discussed and settled the important affairs alluded to above, Mr. Tribe observed, a little uneasily:

"By-the-way, there was something else I wished to speak to you about in private."

"What's that?"

"Hem! Have you heard anything about old Perkins lately?"

"Perkins be damned!" was the harsh reply, whilst an angry flush came over the speaker's face.

"I'm inclined to think he won't, sir," rejoined Mr. Tribe sardonically; "there was a deal of quiet obstinacy about Perkins, and he was just the man, I should say, to go and do the very opposite."

"What are yer driving at," snarled Mr. Triggs, "with your *was* this, and *was* that, and *was* the other? What d'ye mention the man's name for just now?"

"Because I heard something about him only a few hours ago."

"Well, and what did you hear?"

"I heard that he was—dead."

There was a short pause, and then Mr. Triggs, in a tone expressive rather of annoyance than of any other feeling, observed:

"Oh! he's dead, is he? And when did *he* die, pray?"

"This morning."

"How do you know?"

"His son told me."

"His son! Ah! I recollect; he had a son left, I believe. But how did *you* come to know anything about the son? I thought he'd gone abroad, years ago."

"Yes, he had; but he has come back."

"Like a bad shillin,' I suppose," growled Mr. Triggs; "and he found you out, to beg of you, I've no doubt."

"Not at all; he found me out certainly, but it was for a very different purpose."

"What did he want, then?"

"Your address."

"My address! Oh! he's comin' to beg of me, then, I suppose," muttered Mr. Triggs discontentedly.

"I don't *think* so; for he told me he was very well off, and that was the very reason why he felt his father's death so much more."

"Why? what difference 'd that make?"

"Because, he thinks, that, if he had known everything, he might have arrived in England in time to save his father's life."

"How so? What was the matter with old Perkins?"

"I don't know what the doctor may have called it in the certificate, but young Perkins gave it a very plain name—starvation."

"Then the young blackguard ought to be ashamed of himself, and him so well off. If he does call on me, I shall give him a bit o' my mind."

"But he didn't know to what a state his poor old father and mother had been reduced. Besides, he had been in the habit of sending them small remittances, it appears, from time to time, but latterly, I understand, the poor creatures had been moving about so often from lodging to lodging that they never got his letters of advice."

"Ah! that's what *he* says," sneered Mr. Triggs; "he wants to shift the blame to somebody else, o' course. What sort of a lookin' feller is he? A little bit of a sneak, with a squint, like his father, no doubt."

"Oh! no, not at all; a fine, strapping, good-looking fellow, as strong as a lion and with a very determined air. What you would call an ugly customer," added Mr. Tribe, with a curious glance towards Mr. Triggs.

"And what the devil can he want to see me for?" observed Mr. Triggs in a tone of surprise; but, after musing for a few moments, he remarked, with a short laugh: "However, I shall

find out all about him and his business in good time. And now Dan, about Madam; have you discovered what it was that took her away in such a hurry?"

"Yes; Captain Davies was on his way home on sick leave, and was taken so ill at Trieste that he was not expected to live. Whether he himself telegraphed for her, or how it came about, I don't know; but, as you are aware, she *was* telegraphed for, and started off post haste. Whether the Captain has recovered, or is in a fair way to recover, or not, and whether they have kissed and made it up or not, is more than I can tell you—as yet. But I shall, no doubt, have to correspond with Mrs. Davies before long on business; and there'll be some tell-tale in the shape of a black-bordered envelope, or an envelope without a black border, or a direct statement from herself, or something in the way of a legal document, which will leave me in no doubt as to the position of affairs."

"I've had nothing but disagreeables to-day, Dan," rejoined Mr. Triggs in a tone of bitter vexation; "and I'm more upset, considerin' the day, than I ever remember to have been before. There's been some dam thing wrong from mornin' to now. But I'm not goin' to let it interfere with my house-warmin'; I'll be jolly to-night if I never am again. So, come along; we'd better go upstairs now to my wife; but you needn't say anything to her about either Perkins or Madam."

"Not I," replied Mr. Tribe cheerily; "I shouldn't have said anything even to *you* about Perkins on an occasion like this, only I wanted to prevent you from being taken by surprise when young Perkins calls, as he proposes to do, at about ten to-morrow morning."

"Let him call, and bad luck to him," observed Mr. Triggs wearily, as he took Mr. Tribe by the arm and ascended to the drawing-room, where Mrs. Triggs, in elegant costume and with a smiling face, was in readiness to receive the expected company.

"This is something like, Etta," exclaimed Mr. Triggs with a flush of pleasure, as he observed the change in his wife's appearance and the air of almost gaiety, so far as her majestic manner admitted of it, with which she welcomed Mr. Tribe; "you'll do me credit after all."

CHAPTER XLI.

A HOUSE-WARMING.

Soul, thou hast goods laid up for many years: take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry.

MR. MULLINS was much dispirited at finding himself obliged to give his countenance to the sort of entertainment provided for the celebration of the house-warming at Portico House. He called it contemptuously, "Triggs's big feed;" and he was very free in the comments he addressed to Mrs. Wells upon the subject.

"It's a low sort o' thing altogether, Mrs. Wells," he remarked disparagingly; "a big feed at nine o'clock; neither dinner nor supper; and they're all to be males, ain't they?"

"They will be all gentlemen, except mistress," replied Mrs. Wells; "she will remain with them till they have their bowl of punch, and then——"

"A bowl o' punch!" interrupted Mr. Mullins, with a look of horror; "a bowl o' punch! Why, it's a reg'lar pot'us affair."

"Oh! master likes a bowl of punch," replied Mrs. Wells, laughing heartily, "and so do his friends. You must recollect, Mr. Mullins, that this is not a regular party; that will come in due time, I've no doubt; but this first night master is going to have a friendly house-warming with some of his old friends, bachelors many of 'em, who've known him for years and years, when he was lower down on the ladder, and done business with him. They're mostly old-fashioned gentlemen,

who dine in the City early, and finish up with a bit o' supper. We're none of your stuck-up, would-be-fashionable folks, Mr. Mullins," she concluded, with some irritation.

"Well, well," rejoined Mr. Mullins, with an air of resignation, "it'll soon be over, and by to-morrow I shall be able to make up my mind whether I think I can stawp. One comfort is that all I've got to do is to let 'em in at the door and sooperintend the arrangements; the gals 'll do the principal part o' the waitin'. Ah! there's a ring at the bell; 'the Campbells are comin';' so adoo, Mrs. Wells, for the present."

And Mr. Mullins proceeded leisurely upstairs to the hall, where he took up his station, and was very busy for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes, ushering in and announcing the guests, as they arrived in quick succession. They were to the number of about a dozen; and Mr. Mullins found an opportunity of confiding his belief to Mrs. Wells, much to her indignation, that there "wasn't a gen'l'man among 'em."

The guests were met, the feast was set, and Mr. Mullins was much scandalised to hear the merry din. For the visitors were an uncereemonious company, consisting principally of bluff, hearty, substantial fellows, with no "airs" and with large accounts at their bankers; men after Mr. Triggs's own heart. They ate a great deal and they drank a great deal, they spoke out and they laughed out, without any attempt at subduing their tone of voice or their roars of merriment, and they were not given to mincing any matters save the viands upon their plates: their English they merely hashed. Nor were they overawed by the presence of Mrs. Triggs, who presided with much grace, dignity, affability, and apparent zest, at the end of the table away from the door, whilst her stalwart husband did the honours at the other end. The conversation was chiefly about money; or, at any rate, about things and persons connected in some way with the great subject of money. And Mrs. Triggs had no reason to complain that she did not obtain a woman's full rights, so far as her capacity for understanding financial matters was concerned. Her immediate neighbours regaled her with stories about the Bank-rate, stocks, shares, and all manner of investments, as

if they were matters in which no lady could fail to take the greatest interest. And, to tell the truth, Mrs. Triggs, under her husband's tuition, had become so well acquainted with such questions, that, if she did not really feel a deep interest in them, she could feign it, and she showed so much knowledge of pecuniary affairs and exhibited so much shrewdness in her suggestions for the attainment of the main chance that her neighbours considered her the most agreeable, chatty, well-informed, fascinating woman they had ever met, and mentally calculated how much in hard cash she must be worth to Triggs. The two gentlemen on either side of her were bachelors; and they sighed to think how much rosier their lives might have been, could they only have secured such a wife as Mrs. Triggs, a wife whose heart was evidently in the right place, who had such a fund of pleasant and interesting discourse, and who, as a partner to confide in, and even to take counsel of, must be quite "worth her keep" and a great deal over. But the topic which seemed to have most attraction for the company was the amount of wealth which this man or that man had left at his death. And there was quite a warm dispute over the case of a certain Mr. Scratchpole, who was stated by one of the guests to have died worth two millions and a half.

"It was three million, sir, if it was a penny," vociferated another, as if he was defending the deceased from some unjust aspersion; "three million, if it was a penny; I had it from one of the executors."

"And pray what became of it all?" asked Mr. Tribe, laughing a little ironically, for he alone appeared to treat the favourite topic with levity; "old Scratchpole had no wife or family, I believe."

"It went mostly to orspittles," said the person addressed, "and similar institooshuns; but the point is, what he died worth, and I say three million; I had it on the best authority. He was forced, in a manner, to leave it to orspittles, else he might have had some feller, after his death, turning up from Australia or somewhere and claiming to be next o' kin, though Scratchpole had never clapped eyes on him, nor even so much as

heard of him, in all his life. And that 'ud never do, you know; better let orspittles have it than some idle young scamp."

"Oh! certainly," rejoined Mr. Tribe; "hospitals are very deserving places: and perhaps some of old Scratchpole's relations (for no doubt he had some somewhere) will come in for a little of his bounty in that way. Only I can't say that I have much respect for people who wait till they're dead before they do any good to their fellow-creatures, and then do it for no better reason than that they *must* dispose of their property in some way, or let it go they don't know how. I've heard that old Scratchpole was a regular screw and curmudgeon as long as he lived; allowed himself a guinea a week, and never had a umbrella of his own, but always borrowed one."

"Never mind old Scratchpole," interrupted Mr. Triggs cheerily, "nor what he died worth. Never say die—that's my motto. At any rate, I don't mean to live like old Scratchpole, whatever I may die worth."

"That was a sad end of poor Morson's," remarked a melancholy guest, shaking his head; "lived like a prince, and to everybody's astonishment died insolvent."

"Well, I don't mean to live like a prince, nor yet to die insolvent," observed Mr. Triggs a little sulkily.

Mrs. Triggs saw her husband's gloomy look, and created a diversion by seizing the opportunity, as the table had been cleared, of rising and leaving the gentlemen to prolong their convivial meeting. She had to pass her husband in order to leave the room; and, as she swept by the door he held open for her, she put her hand lightly on his wrist and whispered: "Pray, be careful."

Mr. Triggs answered with an impatient nod. He returned to his seat, summoned Mr. Mullins, and briefly ordered:

"Pipes and spittoons; and the bowl of punch."

Mr. Mullins went like one that had been stunned, and, descending to the kitchen, consulted Mrs. Wells.

"Triggs," he said in a tone of despair, "have ordered—pipes, and—and—spittoons! Do you know anything about it?"

"Oh! yes," answered Mrs. Wells calmly, producing from a

cupboard a bundle of "churchwardens"; "here are the pipes; I kept them here on purpose."

"But—spittoons, Mrs. Wells!" observed Mr. Mullins in a tone of horror; "I've no objection to smoking—even a pipe—a churchwarden; but—spittoons!"

"Well, poor gentlemen, and why not?" replied Mrs. Wells, bridling; "would you have them choke?"

"Choke! Yes," answered Mr. Mullins severely, "rather than spit—in a spittoon—in a gentleman's dining-room. Yankees, I know, spit on the carpet; so do undergradjuits at Hoxford and Cambridge—that is, undergradjuits of the common sort; but the hupper classes, in London life, 'ud choke before they'd spit—in a spittoon—like a tap-room. I'll do Triggs the justice to say that he did wait till his missis had left the room; and I heard her tell him, as she left, to be careful. I s'pose she knew his habits, and alluded to the new carpet."

"It wasn't that, I doubt," sighed Mrs. Wells, as her face grew sad and overcast; "master has been ailing lately—but there, do attend to the bell; you'll find the spittoons in that cupboard yonder."

Mr. Mullins obeyed, and, after the lapse of a few minutes, returned quite prostrated.

"They're speechifyin' now," he remarked, with a groan; "it's a reg'lar free-and-easy."

And, truly enough, the glasses had scarcely been filled with the steaming punch, when Mr. Triggs had told Mullins he might go, and Mr. Tribe, before Mullins had quite gone, had risen to his feet, and commenced a short oration.

"Our host has permitted me, gentlemen," said Mr. Tribe, "to propose a toast which we shall all, I am sure, drink with enthusiasm. You may none of you be aware, gentlemen, what an especially auspicious occasion this is, and what a long-cherished purpose has this day been accomplished. I, perhaps, know more about it than any of you do; and that is the reason why I, who am the least worthy among the company here present, have been chosen for the agreeable task I am now performing. To you this gathering at our friend's hospitable

board is probably nothing more than an ordinary housewarming on the occasion of a change of residence; but you will soon learn, as I understand, from the mouth of our friend himself, why it is that this celebration is very naturally regarded by him, as it will be by you, as a festival of a peculiar and extraordinary character. In the meanwhile, I will simply call upon you to drink the toast which has been committed to me for proposal: health and long life to our host, and may he enjoy the ownership of his new house, in peace and plenty, for many years to come."

The toast was drunk with acclamation, and Mr. Triggs rose to return thanks. He was not nervous, he never had been; but his excitement was quite painful to witness. His face was flushed, his eyes were dilated, his features twitched, he shook with suppressed emotion.

"I've won the double event, my friends," he shouted, "though I daresay you, none of you, know what I mean. My good friend, Dan Tribe there, he knows more than anybody, but he don't know quite all. My wife herself don't know above half; but she knows as much as is good for her. I'm afraid I shall have to bore you with a lot of my personal history, to make everything plain; but I hope you'll put up with it. I won't detain you longer than I can help, and I think you'll like to hear the tale. This is a great day for me; to-day I've put the finishing touch to a edifice I've been building up almost ever since I can remember. Two things I set my heart upon almost as soon as I could calc'late compound interest; and that was when I was pretty young, I can tell yer, though I never had a reg'lar edgercation. It was a bold thing for a boy, and a boy that had swep' out his master's office to begin with; but the very fust time I ever stood inside the door o' this house, at the time when it was my master's, I kind o' made up my mind that I'd have it myself some day; and when I thought over the best way of gettin' it, the best and safest I could see was to marry my master's daughter, though, as it turned out, I nearly came in for the slip betwixt the cup and the lip, marrying the eldest daughter, and the house being left, not to her, as it ought to ha' been, but to the

other. Well, that was my double event that I went in for winnin'. And I've won it. I don't mean to swagger and brag, and make out that I took a solemn oath, at the very first, that I'd win this double event. I don't believe exactly in what people very often say after they've got what they wanted, tellin' us they made a vow that they would get it, or made a bet (with themselves) that they'd win, and that they've nobody and nothing but themselves to thank for what they done. I dessay they fully believe it themselves when they say so; you can come to believe any lie after a time by letting your mind dwell upon it; but, nine times out of ten, it's only after they've won that they begin to be quite sure that they swore at the very fust that they'd win, or that they made a bet (with themselves) they'd win. It's generally a gradjal matter. It's something like this: at fust, you fancy a thing tremenjuously, and you swear you'll do all you know to get it; then you have a slice of luck, which brings you a little nearer your object, whether it's a double event or what not; then what was little more than a strong hope becomes a steady aim; and at last, perhaps, what with working like mad, and what with a slice or two more of luck, you find yourself "burning," as they say in the child's game, and then you do swear that you'll do the whole trick, and, when you've done it, you begin to think that you meant every bit of it all along, and that you controlled all the succumstances all through so as to make 'em square with the oath you fancy you took. I know I began like that; and I had plenty of luck. If I'd won only part of the double event, as I was very nigh doing at one time, I don't know but what I should have thought I'd won all I bargained for, and all I'd actually swore to have; but as time went on and chances increased, I made up my mind that I'd swore to win the whole double event, and I wouldn't take less. Not but what I was toiling for the whole of it, mind you, all the while; but it didn't always stand out quite clear and distinc' before my mind. You all know how I married my master's daughter, and how I've stepped into my master's house; but you didn't any of you know afore to-night, I dessay, that I set my heart on that double event at the time

when the odds seemed more in favour o' my marryin'"—(here he faltered slightly)—"marryin' some por gal, and endin' my days in the workus. It was no child's play, I can tell yer, though I *did* have a good slice o' luck now and then. And see what I had to nerve me and urge me on! This was the house which had seemed to me to be almost as difficult to get into, so as to stay there, as Millbank is for a convic' to get out of, and so I felt sort o' bound to do it; this is the house where my master had lived, and so I thought I should never feel I was master in his place, until I lived there too; this is the house where I'd had to stand many a time waiting in the hall, snubbed by the women-servants and patronised by the men-servants, and no more dreaming o' being asked to walk upstairs, than if the staircase had been Jacob's ladder, and so I felt as if I could never rest till I went up and down as I pleased and ordered the servants about at the bottom. There's nothing partic'lar in the house as a house to make me hanker after it, but it's the 'sociations that drove me to set my heart on *this* house; and no other house would do. You'll understand the feeling. Well, then, I soon found that to succeed—and I meant to succeed, so fur as it depended upon *me*—I mustn't stick at a trifle, and should have to do a many things at which my better nature, as the canting folks call it, revolted, or would have revolted, if I'd ha' let it: so I did 'em. I'm no hypocrite; and I soon saw that what my poor old mother had taught me about my dooty to my neighbour and all that, and what I'd heard the parsons preach, and what I'd learnt at the sort o' scratch school I went to for a short time, wouldn't do at all in *my* line o' life; so I cut all that. I ain't an infiddle; I'm a Christian; I was born so, and I mean to stick to it—at least in a general way. I ain't a scholar, nor I don't want to be, and if I was, I ain't got the time to argue it all out, but I'm quite certain of one thing: so fur as I can understand plain English, Gospel and business—the business, I mean, that you have to do to get on, as I've got on—don't go well together. I don't believe there's any business in the City that can be carried out on what they call Gospel principles and not get into the *Gazette*. There's parsons, I believe, who

can reconcile the two, and very pop'lar they are in consequence, and many a teapot and purse o' sovereigns, and, maybe, a fat livin' now and then, they get presented to 'em; but to *my* mind, it's all gammon and sophystree, or whatever they call it in the upholstery-trade. The view I take of it is this: Scripture they say has been proved to be all wrong as regards Genesis and Noah's ark and all that part o' the Bible; and it's likely to be just as wrong in some o' the other parts. And so I go on with my Christianity on the off chance. Then there's that balderdash people talk about work nowadays, pretendin' that work is a blessin', and a honour, and a crown o' glory, and all that stuff and nonsense. According to the way they preachify they ought to treat the reg'lar hard-working man, him that really bears the burden and heat o' the day, as a sort o' superior being; but they only treat him so in what they call the abstract, and, when they meet him face to face, in the flesh, they either won't touch him with the tongs or they patronise him and expect him to kow-tow to them and to know his place, and all because he carries the signs of his noble, blessed, honourable work about him, and has to do so much of it to get a bare living that he has to begin very early in life and can't come up to them in his skin and his hair and his dress and his smell and his language and what they call refinement and culcher. Could there be any better proof of the humbug at the bottom of all their twaddle? Of course, they'd say that there's work and work, and that one sort o' work is higher than another. But that's all bosh again. Work's work, and the most essenshle of all work is that which keeps a man alive, and which was put upon us by what they call the primal curse. 'Cursed is the ground for thy sake,' is what the Bible says; 'in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.' That's a bit o' Scripture I *do* believe in. Work is a curse, and was meant to be; and the proof is, if any proof were needed, that the object of every man's life is to dodge it, as fur as possible, if not for himself, at any rate for his children, so that he may leave them sufficient provision to prevent them from having to eat bread in the sweat of their faces. And I don't know why you shouldn't dodge a curse, if

you can. But in the case of work, you can only succeed in doin' so, if you have to depend on yourself, by doubling it for a time. And in working myself up, I convinced myself of the humbug they talk who call work—the work a man has to do to get ahead of the world—a blessing. Lord, how I have worked! I've always been as strong as a horse, boy and man; and even *I* have groaned under the burden sometimes. Day and night, body and brains, aching with labour, fretting at injustice, mad at the bullies set over me, vexed at losses, pinching, saving, scraping, well-nigh starving—Lord, how I have worked! That's the sort of work that people, parsons and all, praise up to the skies; and I'll swear that sort of work is no blessing. If work is such a great blessing, wouldn't Eternal Work rather than Eternal Rest be looked upon as Heaven? Question the people who will have it that hard work is a blessing, as I have questioned them, and you'll soon redooce 'em to this: work, such work as *I* have done, is only a blessing *sometimes*, when there is some dreadful trouble on the mind, just as medsun is a blessing, devilish nasty, but better than the suffering you take it for; work is a blessing just as cricket or the felling of trees is a blessing, when the exercise is not carried on so fur as to become painful; work is a blessing, when time hangs heavy on your hands, and you can stop working whenever you please; but in all these cases, it's rubbish, o' course, to speak of work at all. People who talk of work being a blessing, don't mean work; they mean ockyerpation. *I* mean *work*; and I worked double tides, 'cos I meant to succeed. If I was a hypercrite, I should say that Providence had blest my labours; but, not being a hypercrite, and not believing that Providence cottoned to *me* in partic'lar more than to anybody else, I will only say that, partly by my own exertions, and partly through good openings, I have arrived at a point at which I find I can afford to give up the curse of work, though I shan't by any means give up business, which, I'll allow, is a blessing. Not that I'm a rich man, not what such gentlemen as I see around me would consider a rich man; but if anything was to happen to me this very night, my wife wouldn't have to go on the parish, and my daughter

wouldn't have to go a-begging for a husband for want of a tidy dowry. Excuse me, gentlemen, for detaining you so long; but this is a proud and 'appy occasion—a very proud and happy occasion—for *me*; and I hope we shall often meet again 'round this table. I thank you heartily for the kind manner in which you drank the toast proposed by my friend Dan Tribe; and, before I sit down, I'll ask you to fill your glasses and drink: To our next merry meeting."

The toast was drunk with vociferous goodwill, and the guests settled down to their pipes in earnest. One by one they departed, and Mr. Triggs was left alone. He took a turn or two up and down the room, whilst his face beamed with satisfaction. Suddenly he stopped, leaned upon the back of an easy-chair, and looked fixedly at his reflection in a pier-glass. He passed his hand once or twice over his eyes, and then rang the bell.

"My candle," was all he said, when Mr. Mullins appeared.

"Don't call me to-morrow," he added, when the candle was brought; "I'll ring when I want hot water."

"Very well, sir," said Mullins, rejoicing in his heart at the thought of a good long sleep.

"Bring the plate-basket," said Mr. Triggs suddenly, as if he had just remembered something.

"The plate-basket, sir!" exclaimed Mullins, turning ghastly pale; "there's not been time to clean the plate yet, sir."

"Then take care to have it ready for me as soon as I come down in the morning," was the stern reply.

"Yes, sir," rejoined Mullins, in a low voice, but gazing so steadfastly and anxiously into the very eyes of Mr. Triggs that the latter exclaimed angrily:

"What the devil's the matter with the man! Get about your business."

Mr. Mullins fled precipitately; but, as he went downstairs, he glanced furtively up the staircase and distinctly saw Mr. Triggs steady himself once or twice by the banisters.

"He didn't *look* drunk, either," muttered Mullins to him-

self; "and that asking after the plate looks as if he had been put up to something. We shall see to-morrow."

Still, nobody knew better than Mullins that you should never judge by appearances; and, with a mind influenced by this knowledge, he retired to rest and soon fell asleep.

But he had not been slumbering for many hours, when he was just so far awakened as to be conscious of a certain sound—a sound of tinkling in his ear. It couldn't be the "wakes," for Christmas Day was past and gone; and as he lay dozing and wondering what strange, unearthly noise it was, he turned his half-closed eyes to the wall close by his head. Then all was explained in a moment. Dancing up and down on the wire to which it was attached, with its little tongue clattering wildly, went the bell which communicated between his room and his master's; once, twice, and thrice, continuously, loudly, furiously, it rang, and rang, and rang; so that Mullins had to relinquish his hope of a good long sleep, and was even roused to unusual alacrity. For, so pitch-dark were the winter mornings, that he burned a night-light always by his bedside, and could see where the bell went bobbing in the gloom. He sprang from his bed, slipped on his clothes, lighted a candle, and was quickly at his master's door. He knocked, and it was at once opened by—Mrs. Triggs. She was in her dressing-gown, and looked deadly pale, but was quite self-possessed. Behind her appeared the figure of Mrs. Wells, flitting about the room. Mrs. Triggs spoke a few words in a low voice to Mullins, who rushed downstairs and out of the house, without staying to change slippers for shoes or to put on his great-coat, into which he struggled as he ran along the dimly-lighted streets, swept by a bitter wind. After the lapse of only a few minutes he re-entered the house and with him entered an elderly gentleman. This gentleman went, with noiseless footsteps, straight up to Mr. Triggs's room, whither he was conducted by Mullins, and where he was at once admitted. In less than half an hour the gentleman was let out of the house by Mullins, who asked him a question, and to whom he replied by a shake of the head, at which Mullins grew livid in the face and shook visibly. From

that moment the house appeared to be pervaded by some mysterious influence. Nobody seemed to have summoned anybody ; but, nevertheless, as if by magic, there was a sound of softly-falling footsteps on the stairs, there were seen in recesses and corners the figures of girls with aprons to their eyes, there were heard whispers, and sobs, and one loud wail—the wail of a child in unutterable distress.

Meanwhile Mullins had been despatched on a second errand and returned with Mr. Tribe, who arrived in a state of great agitation, and who, after being closeted for a short time with Mrs. Triggs, departed.

CHAPTER XLII.

YOUNG PERKINS HAS HIS INTERVIEW WITH MR. TRIGGS.

It was just ten o'clock on the morning after the house-warming at Portico House, Notting Hill, when the visitors' bell was rung by young Perkins. He was dressed in deep mourning; and his features wore a sad and melancholy expression. About his mouth, however, there was an air of grim determination, quite in harmony with the tight, somewhat significant clutch he maintained of his trusty, formidable stick, which had attracted the attention and even the admiration of Mr. Dan Tribe the day before. He observed (with no surprise, however, considering the information he received from Mr. Tribe) that the house looked as if it had not yet been opened for the day; and he was afraid that, in his anxiety to catch Mr. Triggs at home, he might, as it was, have called inconveniently early.

The door was only partially opened and with evident reluctance, at first, by Mullins, who, however, seemed to examine the visitor's costume from head to foot and to be in some degree propitiated by it, for he set the door a little more ajar and exchanged his originally forbidding aspect for one that was apparently sympathetic.

"Can I see Mr. Triggs?" asked young Perkins with more anxiety in his tone than an ordinary visitor might have been expected to show.

"Can—you—see—Mr. Triggs?" rejoined Mullins with mingled surprise, doubt, and perplexity.

"Yes; I should very much like to see him, if I can. I have come at this early hour on purpose. I am aware that it may be inconvenient; but I may not be able to find another opportunity."

"Are you one o' the family?"

"No."

"A friend o' the family?"

"My family has been known to them for very many years; and I don't think there is anybody whose name would be more familiar to them, if you will kindly take it in, and say that I am very anxious to see Mr. Triggs, though I fear I may have called rather too soon."

"Of course you know what took place here last night?" asked Mullins, with another glance at the visitor's black hat-band and black clothes.

"Of course; or else I should have been surprised to see the house in this condition at this hour of the morning. Mr. Tribe told me about it."

"Mr. Tribe?"

"Yes; it was by his advice that I came at this time. He said it would be best; otherwise I couldn't make sure of seeing Mr. Triggs at all."

"Step in, please," said Mullins, as if the last remark had decided him; "I'll inquire. What name?"

"Perkins."

Mullins went his way with stealthy footsteps to a door at the extreme end of the hall; knocked softly, and was admitted. After a brief interval he returned to young Perkins, and said in a low voice:

"Mrs. Triggs hopes you'll excuse her seeing you. She recollects you quite well; and she says that, though it's rather early to come, you can go up, as you say you may not easy get another opportunity. Please to foller that lady."

Mullins pointed to Mrs. Wells, who was standing at the bottom of the staircase expectantly, and who, with a silent gesture of greeting, led the way upstairs.

Young Perkins took off his hat, and, grasping his stick resolutely, followed her in some perplexity, not unmixed with

apprehension and uneasiness. For she said not a word; she moved as if she were afraid of disturbing a sleeper or an invalid, and she had a key in her hand. He marvelled greatly what this mysterious behaviour could mean, and what would be the upshot; but he had come with a set purpose, and he was determined not to breathe a syllable which might spoil his plan and prevent him from seeing the man with whom he had come to have a reckoning face to face.

At length Mrs. Wells unlocked a door very gently, led him along a little passage, and ushered him into a large room with two windows, of which the blinds were drawn down. Little light struggled into the room through and round the blinds; but a bright fire was burning in the grate and brought out distinctly to view a figure lying in the middle of a large bed.

Surely Mr. Triggs must be very ill; or so active a man would never be lying so still in bed, at that time in the morning. And would it be manly to take advantage of even the worst miscreant under such circumstances? But suddenly another idea, a horrible misgiving, occurred to Perkins, as Mrs. Wells motioned silently to him to walk round to the farther side of the bed, whilst she remained on the other side near the door. He obeyed the signal; and, when he was on a level with the pillow, she slowly turned down a sheet and showed him—Mr. Triggs.

"He was a fine man, wasn't he, sir?" said Mrs. Wells with an uncontrollable sob.

And he had won the Double Event.

THE END.

NOVELS AT ONE SHILLING.

Capt. MARRYAT.
 Peter Simple.
 The King's Own.
 Midshipman Easy.
 Rattlin the Reefer.
 Pacha of Many Tales.
 Newton Forster.
 Jacob Faithful.
 The Dog Fiend.
 Japhet in Search of a Father.
 The Poacher.
 The Phantom Ship.
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 Valerie.
 Frank Mildmay.
 Olla Podrida.
 Monsieur Violet.
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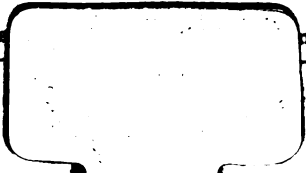
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